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RESEARCH BOOKLET

SAFE & SOUND:

**DEVELOPING A PEER-LED SAFEGUARDING
EDUCATION MODEL FOR TEENAGERS ACROSS
EUROPE.**





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ABOUT THE ERASMUS+ PROJECT / DISCLAIMER



Safe & Sound: Developing a Peer-Led Safeguarding Education Model for Teenagers Across Europe is a small-scale partnership in youth under Erasmus+ Key Action 2 (KA210-YOU, Call 2025), project number 2025-1-MT01-KA210-YOU-000351586. It ran from 1 September 2025 to 31 October 2026. The Don Bosco Foundation, Sliema, Malta, coordinated it with KROV (Serbia), Stichting Don Bosco Youthnet Nederland (the Netherlands) and Domka – Association of Salesian Youth (Slovakia). The granting authority is the European Union Programmes Agency, Malta.

The project produced two documents: this research report and a training toolkit. Both are available free of charge on the project website, www.fdsi.edu.mt.

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01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Safe and Sound is a European youth partnership that aims to make safeguarding a conversation built in collaboration with young people. It does this by equipping young people, youth workers and organisations with tools and skills to recognise and respond to risk in a safe way. Safe and Sound set out to develop a peer-led safeguarding education model for teenagers in non-formal youth work across Malta, Slovakia, the Netherlands and Serbia. This document is the research output of that project. Its central conclusion is that the proposition is sound but conditional. Peer-led safeguarding education can be delivered safely and is worth delivering, but only where the partnership builds specific conditions. They centre on adult supervision and accountability, country-specific confidentiality, and clear written routes for responding to harm, and are set out as design principles in Chapter 9.

Three findings hold across more than one strand of evidence. First, supervision and facilitation quality determine whether peer-led work helps or harms. Four independent bodies of literature converge on that single variable, and no partner currently has supervision in the formal sense. Second, accountability cannot be delegated to a young facilitator. In all four jurisdictions legal responsibility attaches to adults. Third, confidentiality cannot be scripted uniformly. Across the four countries, the duty on receiving a concern ranges from an immediate professional duty to report, through a general criminal-law duty, to a graduated protocol carrying a right rather than a duty.

The most consequential finding is an absence. No partner has a written route for handling harm between young people, even though the prevalence evidence identifies this as the most likely serious incident in an adolescent peer group.

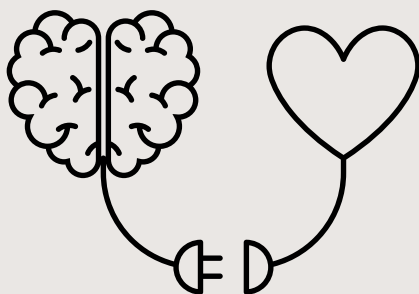
The fieldwork also produced a finding the desk research did not predict. Confidence in talking about safeguarding was high in every country, but confidence in acting on it was not, and the gap between the two is the clearest training need the research identified. Participants asked for a short and specific list: a form of words on confidentiality that is honest about what happens next, criteria for telling a safeguarding matter from ordinary adolescent conflict, a written referral route, and a debrief after handling a disclosure. Nobody asked for more safeguarding content in the abstract.

What follows from this is a set of design principles rather than a curriculum, and recommendations addressed to the people building each project output. The model should be transferable but not uniform: the canonical framework binding the Salesian partners is common ground, while the civil layer requires country-specific inserts throughout.

This research does not show that peer-led safeguarding education by itself reduces abuse or prevents harm. What the project can claim is that it offers a practical, tested way of doing peer-led safeguarding education in non-formal youth work, together with a clear account of what needs to be in place for it to work in each of the four partner countries. It can also reasonably expect to strengthen safeguarding awareness, help-seeking and confidence to have safety conversations among participating teenagers, and to build youth-worker competence and organisational safeguarding capacity.

02

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT CONTEXT



2 INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT CONTEXT

Safe & Sound: Developing a Peer-Led Safeguarding Education Model for Teenagers Across Europe is an Erasmus+ Small-scale Partnership in Youth, running for fourteen months from September 2025 to October 2026. It brings together four youth organisations working in Malta, Slovakia, the Netherlands and Serbia, and is coordinated from Malta. The project names three target groups: teenagers aged 13 to 19, the youth workers and educators who work with them in non-formal settings, and organisations responsible for preventing harm to teenagers and safeguarding them.

It begins from an important paradox. Teenagers sit between childhood and adulthood, most exposed to abuse, harassment and harm at precisely the point where their capacity to recognise and name it is still forming. The adults closest to them face a matching difficulty: how to teach safeguarding without instilling fear or undermining their confidence.

Safe & Sound sets out to resolve this paradox by building the safeguarding conversation with young people rather than delivering it to them. Four of the project's objectives set the direction: to develop a peer-education learning framework for safeguarding awareness; to build the capacity of youth workers and educators to support teen-led safeguarding initiatives; to create youth-led, non-formal safeguarding activities usable in schools and youth organisations; and to establish mechanisms through which safeguarding dialogue among teenagers continues after the funding ends. The remaining objectives are the instruments through which those four are pursued: engaging young people in leading awareness work, researching safeguarding challenges, developing the training programme, running peer-led pilot activities in each partner country, issuing a handbook and manual (referred to throughout this document as the toolkit), training up to five youth workers from every partner, and disseminating the results.

For young people the intended impact is agency rather than compliance. The project positions youth as leaders and advocates with the practical capacity to recognise risk, support a peer, know what help exists and how to reach it, and influence the safeguarding arrangements that apply to them. Forty teenagers took part in the pilot activities directly. The significant claim is not the number reached but the change in what safeguarding education assumes about young people's part in it.

For organisations the intended impact is structural. Twenty youth workers and educators were trained, with the intention that they function as internal trainers rather than as individuals who attended a course. The framework was designed so each can continue training new cohorts once the project closes.

WHAT THE PROJECT SETS OUT TO DO

The table below lists the project objectives.

APPLICATION OBJECTIVE	WHERE THIS DOCUENT SUPPORTS IT
1. To develop a comprehensive peer-education learning framework for safeguarding awareness for youth workers and educators	Sections 3.3, 3.6 and 3.9 establish what peer-led safeguarding education can and cannot realistically deliver, and 3.17 summarises each strand of that evidence against what it requires of the model. Chapter 9 converts those requirements into the fourteen design principles of the framework itself, and Chapter 11 specifies the competences and indicators against which the framework can be assessed.
2. To build capacity among youth workers and educators to support teen-led safeguarding initiatives	Sections 3.7 and 3.12 establish that relational credibility only holds where the organisation contains it. Section 7.9 reports what young people said they want from youth workers. Section 10.1 sets out the training recommendations that follow.
3. To create youth-led safeguarding non-formal activities for schools and youth organisations	Sections 3.5 and 3.11 review the evidence on participation and on safeguarding in non-formal, volunteer-led settings, while 3.8 and 3.10 establish that adolescent harm sits largely in peer groups, public space and online. Chapter 9 then sets the design principles for peer facilitation, age banding, group composition and the four observable safe-space conditions drawn from what young people themselves described.
4. To establish sustainable mechanisms for ongoing safeguarding dialogue among teenagers	Section 3.5 sets out what genuine participation structures require and why voice without influence is counterproductive. Sections 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 report who young people actually go to, how far they trust peers against adults, and what they expect of confidentiality – the conditions any ongoing dialogue has to work with. Chapter 11 measures participation quality against space, voice, audience and influence, and 12.2 identifies a standing role for trained facilitators after the project as the weakest point in the current design.
5. To engage young people's ideas, enthusiasm and energy, inviting them to take the lead on raising awareness and open dialogue on safeguarding	Section 3.5 sets out what genuine participation requires beyond consultation, 7.7 reports what young people themselves said they want to decide, and Chapter 9 states the conditions under which they can lead safely.

APPLICATION OBJECTIVE	WHERE THIS DOCUMENT SUPPORTS IT
6. To research and analyse the challenges of safeguarding practices and how to actively engage young people in preventative action	This is the objective the document as a whole addresses: Chapter 3 reviews the published evidence, Chapter 4 the legal and organisational conditions in each country, Chapter 5 the research method, and Chapters 6 and 7 report the findings from youth workers and young people.
7. To issue a toolkit on having safe conversations about young people's safeguarding, especially with those who have fewer opportunities	Section 3.7 explains what safe disclosure practice requires, and 3.13 and 7.8 set out what young people with fewer opportunities need from it. Chapter 4 shows why wording around confidentiality has to differ by country.
8. To develop a training programme for youth workers and educators on the peer-led, non-formal safeguarding education model for teenagers	Section 6.6 supplies the training needs analysis in participants' own terms (the confidentiality wording, the safeguarding-versus-conflict judgement, the referral route and facilitator debriefing) and 6.1 to 6.5 evidence the gap between confidence in talking and confidence in acting that the programme has to close. Chapter 9 sets the design constraints the programme must work within, 10.1 gives the programme recommendations, and Chapter 11 defines the learning indicators by which the training will be measured.
9. To run peer-led pilot activities for young people in each partner country	Chapter 4 sets out the legal context and the decisions each pilot must take locally. Chapter 9 states the conditions a pilot must satisfy before it runs, Chapter 11 converts the critical ones into pre-pilot readiness gates that stop a pilot if unmet, and Section 8.4 states honestly what the pilots can and cannot be expected to demonstrate.
10. To train up to five youth workers from every partner in animating a peer-led approach to safeguarding education for teenagers	This objective is a delivery commitment of the training activity rather than a research question, so it is recorded here for completeness rather than evidenced in this document.
11. To disseminate and share the results among youth workers and youth organisations	Section 12.1 sets out the dissemination approach - SALTO-YOUTH and partner networks, multiplier events led by young people who took part in the pilots. Section 12.2 sets out the sustainability measures that have to follow, and Chapter 11 requires documented evidence that feedback was used to revise the toolkit and training.

HOW THE RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE PROJECT OUTPUTS

The application funds four linked activities: **research, a youth-worker training course, peer-led pilots in each partner country, and dissemination**. This document is the output of the first. It is the input to the training and the pilots, and it supplies the substance that dissemination carries, though dissemination runs alongside the other activities rather than only after them.

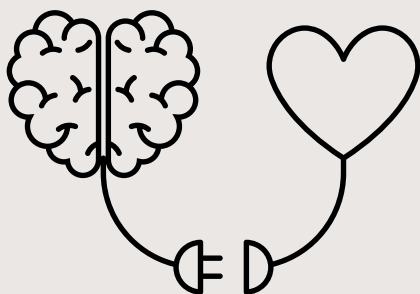
- The training programme draws on Chapters 6, 9 and 10 for content.
- The toolkit draws on 3.7 for disclosure practice, on Chapter 4 for the legal context behind the country-specific inserts, which each partner will complete and verify for its own jurisdiction, and on Chapter 10 for structure.

A NOTE ON WHAT THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT

This is a project research document, not an academic paper. It is written to be used by youth workers and partner organisations as well as read by evaluators. Where the evidence is contested or thin, that is stated plainly because a safeguarding model built on an overstated evidence base is more dangerous than one built on a modest but honest one.

03

LITERATURE REVIEW



3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sets out the evidence base for the Safe and Sound model. It is deliberately analytical rather than prescriptive. It establishes what the research literature supports, what it does not support, and where the evidence runs out. Operational consequences are drawn together separately in Chapter 9, and recommendations in Chapter 10. This chapter follows the three review questions set out in 3.1. Sections 3.3 to 3.5 cover the foundations: how young people develop and what that means for safeguarding education, how common harm is across Europe, and why genuine participation matters. Section 3.6 asks what the evidence actually shows about peer-led education, and Sections 3.7 to 3.9 set out what is needed to run it safely: responding well when a young person discloses something, recognising harm that happens outside the family, and dealing with harm between young people. Sections 3.10 to 3.12 look at where the model will be used: online spaces and data protection, volunteer-led youth work, and how organisations are led and held to account. Sections 3.13 and 3.14 cover under-served youth, and the European policy and recognition framework the model has to fit. Sections 3.15 to 3.17 close the chapter with the gaps in the evidence, the limits on what can be claimed, and what the evidence does support.

3.1 PURPOSE & REVIEW QUESTIONS

This review supports the Erasmus+ Small-scale Partnership Safe & Sound: Developing a Peer-Led Safeguarding Education Model for Teenagers Across Europe. This chapter is the structured desk-research strand of the research activity described in Chapter 2. It analyses the challenges of safeguarding practice and how young people can be actively engaged in preventative action, and is framed around the questions derived from the Erasmus+ application (Don Bosco Foundation Malta, 2025):

How should developmental science about adolescence shape the design of safeguarding education?

What does the measured evidence show about peer-led education, including null findings, adverse findings and limits on what can responsibly be claimed?

What do participation, contextual safeguarding, relational practice and digital rights scholarship contribute to a model built on non-formal youth work rather than statutory procedure?

Four analytical constructs recur through the sections that follow. They are lenses rather than a restatement of the questions above:

Developmental readiness concerns what adolescents at different stages can be asked to do.

Participation rights, whether young people hold genuine influence rather than consultation.

Extra-familial harm, recognising that much adolescent risk sits in peer groups, public space and online rather than only in the family.

Organisational containment, whether adult systems can hold the responsibility that peer-led work must not transfer to young people.

Alongside these lenses, the review applies a further test throughout: whether the evidence actually supports what the model proposes to do. That question is taken up in Section 3.6.

3.2 METHOD & EVIDENCE BASE

This is a structured narrative review rather than a systematic review. The three questions in 3.1 were derived by the author rather than taken from an established framework: the third preserves the conceptual fields already present in the project's earlier documentation and the topics selected in the application, while the first and second were formulated to address limitations identified in that documentation: the absence of developmental evidence and the absence of any test of peer-led effectiveness.

Searches were conducted in Scopus, ERIC, PsycINFO and SocINDEX, supplemented by grey literature from the Council of Europe and the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership for European youth work standards, WHO Europe for adolescent health data, the EU Kids Online survey network for children's online experience across Europe, the WeProtect Global Alliance threat assessments for online sexual harm, and the Contextual Safeguarding programme for extra-familial harm research. Search terms combined adolescent safeguarding, peer education, youth participation, extra-familial harm, contextual safeguarding, trauma-informed practice and non-formal youth work. The date range was 2015 to 2026. Earlier material was retained only where a work remains the standard reference for a concept in current use; three such works are cited (Hart, 1992; Dishion et al., 1999; Lundy, 2007).

Sources were included where they addressed adolescents aged approximately 10 to 19, reported empirical findings or carried authoritative policy standing, and were available in English. Sources were weighted according to their evidential strength and purpose rather than treated as equivalent. Systematic reviews and multi-country surveys carry the empirical claims, single qualitative studies are used for mechanism and meaning rather than prevalence, and grey literature is used for policy standing and for data not otherwise published. Where a claim rests on a single study or a single national evidence base, that limitation is noted where the claim is made rather than flagged by a standard formula. Documentary sources also include the Erasmus+ application and the four partner organisations' own safeguarding policies, which are read as evidence of organisational conditions rather than as research findings.

The four partner policies were read using a common template: scope and definitions; who holds designated safeguarding responsibility; the internal reporting route; the external referral route and its legal basis; recruitment and vetting; training requirements; provisions on digital contact, images and consent; and any treatment of harm between young people. Reading them against a fixed template makes comparison possible and makes absences visible, which is how several of the gaps recorded in this review were identified, among them the variation in reporting routes, vetting and digital provisions across four organisations in the same religious family, and the finding that none of the four instruments treats harm between young people as a distinct category with its own response route.

3.3 ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND WHAT IT REQUIRES OF SAFEGUARDING EDUCATION

The claim that adolescence needs its own safeguarding lens must rest on developmental science rather than assertion. Adolescence is a sensitive period in which the brain is unusually responsive to social information, and in which motivation, learning and identity are shaped through social experience rather than instruction (Dahl et al., 2018). Socio-emotional and reward systems mature earlier than the regulatory systems that moderate them, which explains why adolescents are more responsive to peer presence, social status and reputational risk than either younger children or adults (Dahl et al., 2018). The same sensitivity that increases exposure to peer influence makes adolescence a period of exceptional opportunity. It involves social learning that is credible, participatory and peer-mediated and may be absorbed more deeply at this stage than at any other.

Two consequences follow. If adolescents learn safety through social experience, safeguarding education delivered as instruction will underperform relative to education delivered through dialogue and rehearsal. But if social evaluation carries heightened weight, then any activity exposing a young person to peer judgement, to disclosure in front of others, or to visible association with a safeguarding topic must be designed with increased care. The developmental case for peer-led work and the developmental case for caution in peer-led work rest on the same evidence.

The literature also warns against treating teenagers as a single group. Early adolescence, roughly 10 to 14, is marked by pubertal change and intense sensitivity to peer acceptance. Mid-adolescence, roughly 14 to 16, brings greater autonomy, intimate relationships and wider unsupervised movement through physical and digital space. Late adolescence, roughly 16 to 19, involves more settled regulatory capacity and a growing ability to hold responsibility for others (Dahl et al., 2018). This matters directly here as the project's target group of teenagers aged 13 to 19 spans all three stages in a single category (Don Bosco Foundation Malta, 2025). The evidence does not require the target group to be narrowed, but it does require differentiation within it. It is paramount to identify which activities suit which band, at what age a young person may facilitate, and which groupings should not be mixed where disclosure is foreseeable.

Developmental variation matters alongside developmental stage. Earlier pubertal timing is associated with earlier exposure to sexualised attention and to relationships with older peers (Mendle et al., 2007), and neurodivergent or disabled young people, a group also at substantially elevated risk of violence and abuse, may process social cues and group facilitation differently, so education assuming a typical communicative style will be less effective (Jones et al., 2012; Stalker & McArthur, 2012). Gender and sexuality shape both the harms young people encounter and the credibility they attribute to adults. Developmental readiness is therefore not a single threshold but a set of conditions varying within any group of teenagers.

Translated into safeguarding terms, the developmental picture explains why adolescent risk is located differently from that of younger children. Teenagers move through public and semi-public space, participate intensively in digital environments, explore intimate relationships and negotiate belonging through peer norms. Harm may therefore be normalised within their own environments before adults recognise it as a safeguarding matter. Traditional child protection has prioritised intrafamilial harm and adult-to-child abuse. While both remain crucial, they do not exhaust adolescent risk (Lloyd et al., 2024). They can also leave under-recognised the risks that arise between young people themselves, including peer violence, coercion, harmful sexual behaviour and abuse mediated through digital spaces.

Adolescence also combines competence with vulnerability. Teenagers often read their own social worlds more accurately than adults do, while remaining constrained by peer pressure, loyalty conflicts, fear of ridicule and uncertainty about whether adults will overreact. A model treating them as passive recipients of protection will fail to engage that competence, but a model that expects them to safeguard themselves or their peers risks exposing them to further harm in the name of empowerment (Lefevre et al., 2019; Dishion et al., 1999). Risk is also unevenly distributed: poverty, racism, migration stress, exclusion, discrimination and mental health difficulties increase vulnerability and reduce access to support (Lloyd & Firmin, 2020).

3.4 THE EUROPEAN EVIDENCE PICTURE

A safeguarding review should be able to state how large the problem is. The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, drawing on around 280,000 adolescents aged 11, 13 and 15 across 44 countries, found that approximately 11% had been bullied at school and 16% had experienced cyberbullying (Cosma et al., 2024). School bullying has remained broadly stable since 2018, but cyberbullying has increased from 12% to 15% among boys and from 13% to 16% among girls. In the same survey, 12% reported cyberbullying others and 10% reported involvement in physical fighting (Cosma et al., 2024). In an average youth group of 20 teenagers, several will have direct recent experience of peer victimisation.

The EU Kids Online survey of 25,101 children aged 9 to 16 across 19 European countries adds two findings of particular relevance. First, national variation is very wide: the proportion reporting that something online had bothered or upset them in the past year ranged from 7% in Slovakia to 45% in Malta (Smahel et al., 2020). Both are partner countries, and that gap is a direct argument against assuming a shared baseline of need or awareness. Second, when something does go wrong online, children turn to parents and friends and only rarely to teachers or to the professionals whose role is to help. Around one in ten reported never feeling safe online (Smahel et al., 2020). That young people route distress through peers rather than professionals is the strongest empirical argument in this review for a peer-led approach and simultaneously the strongest argument that peer-led work must connect to adult systems rather than substitute for them.

On sexual harm, the WeProtect Global Alliance recorded an 87% increase in child sexual abuse material reports between 2019 and 2022, alongside the emergence of financial sexual extortion and imagery generated by artificial intelligence (AI), and reported, on a single industry-derived dataset, that a high-risk grooming situation in social gaming environments develops in an average of 45 minutes (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2023). Its later assessment identifies financial sexual extortion as a major threat most often targeting teenage boys, and flags growing concern about peer-to-peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviour between young people (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2025). Peers are therefore not only a protective resource but, in a proportion of cases, the source of harm.

3.5 PARTICIPATION, RIGHTS, INCLUSION & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Participation is one of the clearest conceptual anchors of the project. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the right of children and young people to express their views on matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989), and contemporary scholarship continues to treat this as both a legal and a practical foundation for child-centred decision-making. Lundy's framework of space, voice, audience and influence remains especially useful because it moves participation beyond rhetoric and asks whether institutions have actually created conditions in which young people can speak, be heard and shape outcomes (Lundy, 2007). Hart's ladder of participation and Lundy's model both distinguish tokenistic from meaningful participation, and that distinction remains central here (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007).

In safeguarding, participation is often praised in principle and limited in practice. Adults may seek views after decisions are shaped, confine discussion to safe topics, or involve young people symbolically without altering how practice is organised (Lundy, 2007). The result is not merely ineffective but potentially harmful, because it teaches young people that their voice matters only within adult-defined boundaries. High-quality participatory safeguarding would instead invite young people into structured dialogue about safety and support pathways, make the purpose of activities explicit, give them genuine opportunity to shape content and method, and allow them to refuse or limit participation without penalty.

Participation in safeguarding must nonetheless be bounded. Young people should not be expected to carry adult responsibilities or resolve serious harm themselves (Lefevre et al., 2019). Participation should strengthen agency, understanding and influence without becoming a covert transfer of responsibility. The latter is a risk that is acute in peer-led models, where enthusiasm for youth leadership can overshadow questions about emotional burden, confidentiality and adult accountability. What is needed is participation that is rights-based, meaningful and safeguarded, rather than participation treated as an unquestioned good.

The project repeatedly refers to young people with fewer opportunities, and this should be treated as a core rather than peripheral concern (Don Bosco Foundation Malta, 2025). Safeguarding is not socially neutral. Young people do not enter safeguarding education with equal levels of trust, voice, safety, digital access, adult support or institutional credibility. Personal experience, poverty, minority status, disability, migration, discrimination, unstable housing and social isolation all affect how harm is experienced and whether support feels reachable.

Participation theory becomes more demanding through an inclusion lens. Nominal space for youth voice is not enough if the form of participation privileges confident speakers, dominant languages or culturally familiar styles of expression. Inclusive participatory safeguarding therefore requires varied modes of engagement, accessible facilitation, emotional pacing, culturally aware examples, language support where needed, and deliberate attention to which young people are likely to remain unheard in mixed settings. For peer-led models, this matters most when choosing facilitators. If the same confident young people are always picked, the model reflects only their experience. Quieter young people, and those on the margins of a group, need to be chosen too and their views need to change how the work is done, not just appear in it.

Positive Youth Development offers a further useful lens when applied to safeguarding (Lerner et al., 2005). It avoids reducing safeguarding to danger management, asking instead how competence, confidence, connection, character and caring can be cultivated as developmental assets (Catalano et al., 2004; Lerner et al., 2005). The evidence underpinning these constructs is predominantly United States-based and now two decades old. Much of it comes from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development, a US youth-development cohort that originally followed fifth-grade children, so its application to European teenagers in non-formal settings is argued here rather than established. Adolescents are more likely to recognise harmful dynamics and seek support when they are embedded in supportive relationships with adults and peers, given meaningful opportunities to contribute, and helped to develop communication and problem-solving skills (Blum et al., 2022; Lerner et al., 2005). A strengths-based framing also improves tone. A fear-heavy or punitive approach may alienate young people who have already experienced shame, blame or exclusion, whereas education framing safeguarding as part of healthy relationships, respect, empathy and collective care can feel more credible.

This does not mean strengths replace protection. The risk in youth work discourse is sliding from empowerment into responsibilities, where young people are asked to be resilient in the face of unsafe systems. The literature does not support that. Developmental assets and protective systems should be built together. Youth confidence and peer agency are valuable, but they are not substitutes for adult accountability, organisational safety or structural change.

3.6 PEER-LED SAFEGUARDING: WHAT WORKS, UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS, & WHERE THE LIMITS ARE

Peer-led work is the project's distinctive contribution, so it warrants a close scrutiny. The argument for it proceeds in three steps:

1. What peer education is theorised to do.
2. What the measured evidence shows it actually does.
3. What design conditions follow.

Much of adolescent social life is mediated through peers, and peer norms strongly influence how behaviours are interpreted and whether help-seeking feels possible or risky. Peer-led activity may therefore make difficult conversations feel less formal and less dominated by adult authority. It may help translate abstract concepts such as consent, coercion, pressure or digital boundaries into language that carries social meaning and it may shift peer cultures by making visible the fact that young people can discuss safety without stigma. The EU Kids Online finding that children often turn to peers rather than professionals gives this peer-led mechanism direct empirical support.

The affirmative case is not confined to theory, and two findings support the method directly. One of the most consistent positive results in the peer-education literature concerns the facilitators rather than the recipients. Those who deliver peer education tend to gain in confidence, communication skill and self-efficacy, and these gains are reported more reliably than changes among participants (Topping, 2022). For a project whose second target group is youth workers and youth leaders, and whose design is train-the-trainers, that is a directly relevant benefit rather than a side effect. Separately, connectedness to peers and to supportive adults is itself protective for adolescent health and wellbeing (Blum et al., 2022), which means activity that strengthens the quality of peer relationships carries relevant value independent of the safeguarding content it delivers.

The peer safeguarding literature is directly useful here. Fieldwork on opportunities for peer safeguarding intervention has examined how peer relationships can be mobilised protectively rather than treated only as a source of risk, and points to the value of working with existing peer groups and their norms rather than assembling artificial ones (Latimer et al., 2020). Pilot activity embedded in established youth groups, where relationships and norms already exist and where adults already know the young people involved, is therefore likely to be both safer and more effective than open recruitment into groups formed for the purpose.

A systematic review of European peer education interventions found no evidence that peer education produced the desired behavioural outcomes when compared with control groups, despite its popularity (Tolli, 2012). A later global systematic review of school-based peer education covering young people aged 11 to 18 concluded that overall effectiveness remains unclear, with effects observed more consistently for knowledge than for behaviour (Dodd et al., 2022). Earlier reviews of peer-led sexual health education reached the same shape of conclusion: gains in knowledge and attitudes, weak and inconsistent gains in behaviour (Kim & Free, 2008). Topping's synthesis of review evidence reaches a similar conclusion: peer-led approaches show promise across health and wellbeing outcomes, but differences in design and delivery limit what can be claimed with confidence (Topping, 2022).

There is also evidence that peer-group intervention can cause harm. Research on iatrogenic effects, meaning harm caused by an intervention intended to help, found that aggregating young people in peer-group interventions increased problem behaviour and worsened later outcomes relative to controls, through a process termed deviancy training, and that higher-risk young people were the most vulnerable to these effects (Dishion et al., 1999). Subsequent synthesis of deviant peer influence across youth programmes broadly supports the effect and identifies group composition and the strength of adult structure as its principal moderators (Dodge et al., 2006). It does not show that peer-led work is unsafe in general. It shows that group composition, facilitation quality and supervision are not implementation details but the variables determining whether a peer-led intervention helps or harms.

Alongside effectiveness sit three conditions that determine whether peer-led work is ethical in practice, and the first is role clarity. Peer facilitators are not safeguarding professionals, therapists, investigators or designated safeguarding officers. Where peer-led programmes are poorly designed, young people may feel pressure to respond to disclosures, mediate crises or hold information they do not know how to manage. The latter will inevitably expose young people to emotional harm, creating unsafe expectations among participants and blurring the line between awareness-raising and case response.

Confidentiality is the second condition. Young people may assume peer-led spaces are private or friendship-based, while safeguarding obligations require information-sharing when serious risk is disclosed. Peer facilitators therefore need explicit preparation on what confidentiality means, how to explain its limits, how to avoid promising secrecy, and when to involve adults. Handling the limits of confidentiality transparently is essential to build trust as clarity is often a precondition of trust, because adolescents fear arbitrary adult action more than clearly explained boundaries (Owens et al., 2024).

Representation is the third condition. Peer-led initiatives can unintentionally privilege confident, articulate or socially central young people while marginalising quieter or minority voices, which matters acutely for a project committed to young people with fewer opportunities (Lundy, 2007). Who becomes a peer facilitator is not a neutral selection: it can reproduce social hierarchies if it favours only already-visible leaders.

This literature supports the Safe & Sound proposition. The project should claim knowledge, confidence, dialogue and help-seeking as its outcomes, since that is where peer education demonstrably performs, and avoid claiming behavioural or protective outcomes the evidence cannot support. Facilitation quality and adult supervision are the core of the model rather than its wrapper, because the effectiveness literature attributes most observed variation to precisely these factors (Dodd et al., 2022; Topping, 2022), and group composition requires explicit guidance, because aggregating already-high-risk young people without skilled facilitation is the configuration the harm literature warns against (Dishion et al., 1999). The model is therefore best understood as supported peer facilitation within an adult-accountable system, which is a formulation that preserves the strengths of peer-led work while answering the ethical objections.

3.7 **TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE, TRUST, DISCLOSURE AND WELLBEING**

Trauma-informed practice is one of the foundations of effective adolescent safeguarding. It recognises that abuse, neglect, violence, coercion, humiliation or chronic adversity affect how young people communicate, interpret adults, regulate emotion and respond to support. Adolescents may seek autonomy while carrying fear, shame, mistrust or loyalty conflicts that make disclosure difficult, and a model ignoring these dynamics may silence the very young people it hopes to engage. In practice it means more than kindness: designing environments that feel emotionally manageable, avoiding pressure to disclose, explaining boundaries clearly, responding calmly to distress, and recognising that behaviour may communicate insecurity rather than deliberate resistance.

Research on relationship-based practice and extra-familial harm strengthens the case and adds a warning. Lloyd and colleagues argue that relationship-based practice and contextual safeguarding are conceptually aligned, because both depend on understanding young people in context and because trusted relationships help practitioners read places, peers and the meaning of harm more accurately (Lloyd et al., 2024). But they also show that without systemic and cultural organisational support, relationship-based aspirations collapse under pressure (Lloyd et al., 2024). Trauma-informed and relational practice are therefore not individual worker qualities; they require supervision, shared expectations and organisational culture.

The idea of relational epistemic safety refines this further, and it is also what makes disclosure possible. Owens and colleagues argue that young people facing extra-familial harm need professionals who take their ways of knowing seriously rather than merely securing their compliance, and that achieving this requires professionals to undergo a process of epistemic undoing, i.e. relinquishing privileged ways of knowing and deciding (Owens et al., 2024). Safeguarding education should therefore not only help young people speak but also requires adults to reconsider how they listen, whose knowledge they privilege, and whether they interpret young people through deficit assumptions. Trust follows from this rather than from disposition: young people are significantly more likely to seek help when they believe adults will listen, respond respectfully and act in ways that are clear and proportionate, and trust is shaped by how institutions behave, how power is exercised, and whether their experiences are treated as credible (Owens et al., 2024).

Disclosure is difficult for adolescents because it risks embarrassment, loss of control, peer fallout or adult overreaction. What young people want from professional relationships includes consistency, respect, non-judgement, collaboration and recognition of their social realities (Owens et al., 2024). This suggests that youth workers need more than safeguarding knowledge; they need relational credibility, i.e. the ability to explain confidentiality, listen without panic, avoid blame and acknowledge complexity. Disclosure is also often partial, indirect or delayed. Young people may float hypothetical scenarios, talk about a friend, or disclose through digital channels rather than face to face. Adults therefore need to recognise invitations to talk and respond without demanding linear, formal narratives, which matters especially in non-formal settings where such conversations arise during activity or travel rather than in scheduled casework.

Power dynamics are decisive. Adults and institutions control what happens after a disclosure, and this makes young people wary of speaking (Owens et al., 2024). Participatory and trauma-informed approaches do not remove adult responsibility, but they can reduce unnecessary epistemic and relational inequality by involving young people in decisions where possible, explaining processes clearly, and respecting their view of what safety means (Lundy, 2007). Relationship-based practice must nonetheless not be romanticised: warm relationships alone do not constitute safeguarding, and young people also need clarity, consistency and systems that act responsibly when concerns arise (Lloyd et al., 2024).

Mental health and wellbeing belong inside a safeguarding review rather than alongside it, and the project names physical and mental health and well-being as a topic (Don Bosco Foundation Malta, 2025). Experiences of abuse, exploitation, exclusion, humiliation or chronic fear can contribute to anxiety, depression, self-harm risk, trauma responses or withdrawal (Gilbert et al., 2009; Norman et al., 2012). Conversely, emotional distress, isolation and low self-worth may increase vulnerability to unsafe relationships, coercion or harmful online environments. Safeguarding education treating risk as purely external will miss the extent to which emotional wellbeing shapes how teenagers interpret and respond to situations.

Youth workers are rarely mental health specialists, yet they routinely encounter distress, shame, self-blame, panic and withdrawal. The literature therefore supports training that includes emotional literacy, recognition of distress, calm response, boundary clarity and referral pathways. This does not turn youth workers into therapists. It equips them to respond in ways that are humane, confidence-building and safe. It also supports a non-fear-based orientation, since programmes connecting safeguarding to emotional literacy, belonging and help-seeking may strengthen both safety and mental health outcomes.

3.8 CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING & EXTRA-FAMILIAR HARM

Contextual safeguarding is one of the most significant theoretical anchors for this project. It responds to the limitation of approaches focused primarily on families when many adolescent harms are located in peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods and community spaces. The framework asks not only how an individual young person should change to be safer, but how environments, relationships and systems can be changed to reduce harm (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020). That shift is especially relevant to non-formal youth work, which often operates directly in the spaces where adolescents spend their time.

Contextual safeguarding recognises extra-familial harm and structural inequality (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020). Research on relationship-based practice shows that practitioners need to understand peers and places rather than individuals alone, and that contextual work requires organisational support to be sustained (Lloyd et al., 2024). Work on relational epistemic safety adds a crucial warning: contextual approaches become distorted if they rely on surveillance, data or professional monitoring instead of genuine relational engagement (Owens et al., 2024). For any project claiming to innovate in safeguarding this matters directly. A peer-led model must not become another mechanism for observing young people more closely; it should help create safer contexts by working with them rather than watching over them.

A contextual lens also supports several of the project's design choices at once:

- Work on peer cultures and dialogue, because harm often emerges between young people.
- Attention to digital safety, because online spaces are contexts rather than tools.
- Organisational reflection, because youth work settings are themselves contexts in which norms, boundaries and power relations either create safety or enable harm.

Contextual safeguarding is therefore best treated not as one topic among many but as the frame connecting adolescence, participation, peer-led work, digital life and organisational accountability.

3.9 HARM BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE & HARM SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Harm between young people has surfaced at several points in this review, but it warrants separate treatment as it is a category of harm a peer-led model is likely to encounter. It is not a diminished version of adult-perpetrated abuse.

European evidence establishes that this is common rather than exceptional. A five-country study of young people's online and face-to-face experiences of interpersonal violence and abuse in intimate relationships found substantial victimisation across all sites, with girls reporting markedly more severe negative impact than boys (Barter et al., 2017). The bullying and online-harm data reported in 3.4 describe the same territory from another direction, and the WeProtect assessments now flag peer-to-peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviour between young people as a distinct and growing concern (Cosma et al., 2024; Smahel et al., 2020; WeProtect Global Alliance, 2025). Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges in the UK found sexual harassment and non-consensual image-sharing so routine among the young people it consulted that many saw no purpose in reporting it (Ofsted, 2021).

The harmful sexual behaviour literature supplies the conceptual apparatus. Hackett's continuum distinguishes normal, inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviours, and holds that the same behaviour carries different meaning at different developmental stages (Hackett, 2014). Research on several hundred British children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours found high rates of prior victimisation, family adversity and disability among them, which is why a purely punitive response misreads the population (Hackett et al., 2013). Two implications follow. Adults in the model need a shared vocabulary for judging whether a behaviour is developmentally expectable, inappropriate or abusive, because without one they will either over-refer ordinary adolescent behaviour or fail to recognise abuse. And the model must be able to hold a young person who has caused harm as a safeguarding subject rather than only as a risk to be removed. On what happens after a disclosure, the Barnahus or child-house model is the most developed European standard, bringing child protection, health, police and justice into a single child-friendly setting so that a child recounts their experience once rather than repeatedly (Johansson et al., 2017).

For a peer-led model the consequences are concrete. A peer facilitator may receive a disclosure that names another young person in the same group, or in the same session. This is a situation the disclosure guidance in 3.7 does not by itself resolve, because it turns on what the adult system then does with two young people at once. Group composition guidance must therefore address this directly, and not only the risk of aggregating already-high-risk participants that the deviancy-training literature identifies (Dishion et al., 1999; Dodge et al., 2006). The policy template used in this review included any treatment of harm between young people (3.2); none of the instruments reviewed sets out a distinct route for it. Specifying that route (i.e. who is informed, how the two young people are separately supported, and what is recorded) is an operational task for the toolkit, but this review can state the threshold. A peer-led model without it should not be run.

3.10 **DIGITAL SAFEGUARDING, DATA PROTECTION & EMERGING RISKS**

Digital safeguarding is central because the project explicitly names digital safety and data protection as a theme (Don Bosco Foundation Malta, 2025). Digital environments are best described as spaces of both opportunity and risk. Young people use platforms for friendship, identity exploration, learning, support, creativity, activism and belonging, and for marginalised or geographically isolated young people they may provide access to communities and information unavailable offline.

At the same time, online and offline harms are increasingly intertwined. Bullying continues beyond school hours, coercive control can be exercised through messaging and image demands, harassment is amplified through group chats, and peer humiliation intensifies as audiences expand and material persists. This reinforces the need for a model that does not isolate online safety as a technical module but integrates it into discussions of relationships, consent, pressure, trust and help-seeking. AI-generated harms, deepfakes and image manipulation now require explicit treatment: emerging technologies complicate consent, evidence and reputational harm, and young people may face threats involving manipulated sexual images, deceptive contact or false content spreading rapidly within peer networks (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2025).

For organisations, digital safeguarding is also an internal practice question. Non-formal youth work increasingly uses online communication, hybrid participation, group chats and digital dissemination, which requires clear professional boundaries, moderation practices, consent processes and explicit expectations about digital contact between adults, peer facilitators and participants. Two partner policies already address this: the Slovak directive provides for general consent to camera and social media use in youth centres and for photographs not to be used where the young person or their representative objects (Salesians of Don Bosco - Slovak Province, 2022), and the Maltese policy directs that online contact be treated even more sensitively than contact in person (Salesians of Don Bosco Malta, 2022).

Classifying online risk helps keep the model proportionate. The 4Cs framework distinguishes content risks, contact risks, conduct risks and contract or commercial risks, and separates the risk a young person encounters from the harm that may or may not follow (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021). The distinction matters for a peer-led model in two ways. It prevents the common design error of treating all online experience as risk, which young people recognise as inauthentic and disengage from. And it locates most of what this project is concerned with (bullying, coercion, image-sharing, harmful sexual behaviour between peers) in the conduct quadrant, where peers are both the source of the problem and the most credible route to changing it.

Data protection is a safeguarding matter and not only a compliance one. Article 8 of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation sets the age of consent for information society services (see Chapter 4), and the EU's Digital Services Act now requires providers of platforms accessible to minors to put appropriate measures in place for their privacy, safety and security, and prohibits profiling-based advertising to them (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065). For the project the practical questions are closer to home: what is recorded about a young person during a peer-led session, who holds it, what images are taken and, on whose authority, and which channels adults and peer facilitators may use to contact participants.

AI changes the evidential and reputational picture faster than the safeguarding evidence base can follow. Manipulated sexual imagery, synthetic contact and rapidly propagating false content complicate consent, proof and reputational recovery, and the threat assessments identify financial sexual extortion as a growing risk most often targeting teenage boys (WeProtect Global Alliance, 2025). No peer-reviewed evidence was located on educational responses to AI-generated harm among adolescents. The honest position for the toolkit is therefore to teach the underlying principles of consent, coercion, the permanence of shared material, and where to get help, rather than to attempt platform-specific or technology-specific guidance that will date within the project's lifetime.

3.11 SAFEGUARDING IN NON-FORMAL & VOLUNTEER-LED YOUTH WORK

Safeguarding in non-formal youth work deserves dedicated attention, because Safe & Sound is fundamentally a youth work project. The Council of Europe defines youth work as grounded in non-formal and informal learning and in voluntary participation, delivered by both paid and volunteer youth workers, and underpinned by equality of access, openness, flexibility and a rights-based orientation. It also records that access to youth work, and the quality of provision remain uneven across Europe (Council of Europe, 2017). Participation is voluntary, relationships are more informal, activities are experiential, and learning happens in youth centres, camps, community spaces, outdoor programmes and digital platforms.

The opportunities are significant. Young people often find youth workers more approachable than teachers or statutory professionals, which can make non-formal settings particularly effective places for early help, dialogue and trust-building. The risks are equally important. Informality can produce blurred boundaries where organisational expectations are unclear. Activities may occur in settings where supervision is complex, where travel and overnight stays occur, or where digital communication extends contact beyond sessions. Volunteer-led organisations may combine strong commitment with uneven safeguarding infrastructure. The partner policies illustrate the point: the Dutch camp policy addresses precisely these conditions, setting behavioural rules, requiring privacy provisions at mixed camps without separate washing or sleeping facilities, and requiring new volunteers to attend a full leadership training weekend (Don Bosco Youth and Young People's Camps Foundation, 2019).

This is where Safe & Sound can make a distinctive contribution. Existing safeguarding resources are largely written either as school curricula or as statutory procedure, and comparatively few are designed around the conditions of non-formal practice. By building a peer-led model on non-formal method and intending it for delivery in schools as well as youth organisations, the project addresses that gap without confining itself to a single setting (Don Bosco Foundation Malta, 2025).

Volunteer-led delivery is the condition under which much of this model will actually run, and it is poorly served by the literature. Two of the four partners are substantially volunteer-driven, and the safeguarding standards written for schools and statutory services assume paid staff, line management and mandatory training cycles that volunteer organisations do not have. The legal position compounds this: statutory reporting duties in several European systems attach to named professional groups rather than to all adults working with children (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015), so volunteers may sit outside the specific duty while remaining inside a general one. No systematic evidence was located on safeguarding capability in volunteer-led youth organisations. What the partner policies show is that the gap is met unevenly: one requires a full leadership training weekend before a new volunteer may work with young people, another provides for criminal record certificates at recruitment, and a third may request a certificate only from volunteers without an existing connection to the organisation.

Documenting that variation is itself a contribution, and it sets a realistic floor for what the model can require.

3.12 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE, LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY

Organisational culture is where a safeguarding model either takes hold or fails. Safeguarding failures often arise not because policies are missing but because cultures discourage openness, challenge, reflection or accountability. Young people quickly notice when adults are dismissive, defensive or more concerned with reputation than response, and they equally notice when environments feel respectful, predictable and attentive to their wellbeing. Together, the relationship-based and relational-epistemic literatures establish that organisational culture is not an add-on but the medium through which safeguarding either works or fails (Lloyd et al., 2024; Owens et al., 2024).

The partner policies give an unusually clear view of what that infrastructure looks like in practice, and how much it varies: designated roles, confidentiality obligations and vetting arrangements differ materially across the three instruments and are absent altogether in the fourth partner, as set out in Chapter 4.

Leaders influence whether safeguarding is resourced, whether training is refreshed, whether reflective practice is taken seriously, and whether adults feel safe to raise concerns or admit uncertainty. In a peer-led model, leadership also determines whether youth participation is meaningful or tokenistic: without visible commitment, peer-led methods can be celebrated rhetorically while being weakly supported in practice.

One design question sits across all four partners. None of the policies reviewed contemplates a young person occupying a facilitation role, and the literature offers no established position on it either. The resolution adopted here is structural rather than a new category of person: where a participant leads a session, a vetted adult volunteer remains responsible for that session and oversees it. Vetting requirements, the duty to receive and escalate a disclosure, and accountability for the safety of the activity therefore attach to the responsible adult and not to the young person facilitating. This keeps the model inside each partner's existing framework rather than requiring a new one, and it is consistent with the finding that supervision and facilitation quality are what determine whether peer-led work helps or harms (Dishion et al., 1999; Dodd et al., 2022).

3.13 UNDER-SERVED POPULATIONS: DISABILITY, TRAUMA, MENTAL HEALTH & MINORITY-LANGUAGE YOUTH

The project names young people with fewer opportunities as a core rather than peripheral concern, which requires the evidence on specific populations to be stated rather than assumed. Four bodies of literature matter here, and they are of uneven strength.

Disabled and neurodivergent young people face substantially elevated risk. A systematic review and meta-analysis found children with disabilities significantly more likely to experience violence than their non-disabled peers, with the highest risk among those with mental or intellectual impairments (Jones et al., 2012), and reviews of child protection practice show that this elevated risk is compounded by systems that communicate in ways disabled children cannot easily use (Stalker & McArthur, 2012). The pattern recurs at the other end of the safeguarding relationship: over a third of the 700 young people in the largest British study of harmful sexual behaviour were identified as learning disabled (Hackett et al., 2013). For a dialogue-based, verbally mediated model this is a direct design constraint rather than an inclusion aspiration – a session built on group discussion will systematically under-serve the young people at highest risk unless the method is varied.

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences supply the mechanism behind much of Section 3.7. Large-scale cohort evidence links cumulative childhood adversity to adult physical and mental health outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998), and the syntheses cited in 3.7 establish the association between maltreatment and later anxiety, depression and self-harm (Gilbert et al., 2009; Norman et al., 2012). Two cautions attach. The adverse childhood experiences framework has been criticised for treating a population-level association as an individual-level predictor and for encouraging screening practices that the evidence does not support (Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019). And a trauma-informed approach is a way of designing environments, not a way of identifying individuals: nothing in this model should involve peer facilitators, or youth workers, attempting to establish a young person's adversity history.

Adolescent mental health sits inside safeguarding rather than beside it. Mental disorders account for a substantial share of the global burden of disease among young people, most begin before adulthood, and services reach only a minority of those affected (Patel et al., 2007). For a non-formal model the implication is neither to clinicalise youth work nor to ignore distress, but to equip youth workers with recognition, calm response and referral – the position set out in 3.7.

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Minority-language and migrant young people are the population this review is least able to evidence. No substantial body of research was located on safeguarding education delivered in a minority language in non-formal settings, or on how migrant adolescents in European youth work understand and access safeguarding support. This is a documented absence rather than an oversight, and it matters directly: one partner works with the Croatian minority in Vojvodina and with a cohort in which many young people are migrants. The relational and epistemic safety literature offers the closest available guidance, since its central question - whose knowledge is treated as authoritative - is sharpened where institutional experience is already shaped by minority status (Owens et al., 2024). Beyond that, the project's own fieldwork in Serbia will generate more evidence than the published literature currently provides.

3.14 EUROPEAN POLICY, RECOGNITION, IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION

A transferable model has to be legible to the European youth-work system it will circulate in, and durable enough to survive contact with four different organisations. Four literatures bear on this and none of them is about safeguarding.

European youth policy supplies the frame. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 organises action around engaging, connecting and empowering young people, and carries the eleven European Youth Goals developed through the Youth Dialogue (Council of the European Union, 2018). The Council of Europe's Recommendation on youth work supplies the quality standard for provision (Council of Europe, 2017). Binding obligation comes from the Lanzarote Convention, to which all four partner states are parties: it requires States to criminalise the full range of sexual offences against children, to provide preventive education, and to ensure that people working in regular contact with children are trained in recognising and reporting exploitation and abuse (Council of Europe, 2007). That training duty is the treaty basis for what this project proposes, and it applies to the partners regardless of how each national system implements it. Together they establish that a safeguarding model built on participation is not an innovation the project must justify from first principles but an application of an existing European policy position - which matters for dissemination and for how the model is presented to national authorities.

Recognition of learning is a specific European requirement rather than an optional extra. The European Training Strategy competence model sets out what youth workers working internationally are expected to be able to do (European Commission, 2015).

Implementation determines whether any of this survives delivery. The implementation literature consistently finds that the same programme produces markedly different outcomes depending on the quality and completeness of delivery, and that implementation quality is influenced more by organisational capacity, training and ongoing support than by the design of the programme itself (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). This converges exactly with the peer-education effectiveness finding in 3.6 and the organisational containment finding in 3.12: three separate literatures point at the same variable. For Safe & Sound the conclusion is that fidelity, support and supervision are not overheads on the model but constitutive of it.

Evaluation of non-formal youth work is the weakest of the four. There is no settled instrument for measuring safeguarding outcomes in non-formal settings, and the peer-education literature reviewed in 3.6 measures knowledge and attitudes far more reliably than behaviour.

Research ethics with young people applies throughout. Established guidance requires that participation be genuinely voluntary and revocable, that consent be informed and renewable rather than obtained once, that young people understand the limits of confidentiality before they speak, and that researchers plan in advance for disclosures arising during participation (Alderson & Morrow, 2020).

3.15 GAPS IN THE EVIDENCE & THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

Six gaps emerge from this review, and each corresponds to something the project's own research is positioned to address.

First, the peer education evidence base is drawn overwhelmingly from school settings and from health topics such as sexual health and substance use. There is no comparable body of effectiveness evidence for peer-led safeguarding education in non-formal youth work. The project's pilots can generate the first structured account of how the method behaves in that setting, provided outcomes are specified in advance.

Second, the effectiveness literature identifies facilitation quality and supervision as the variables that determine whether peer-led work helps or harms but rarely specifies what adequate facilitation and supervision consist of (Dishion et al., 1999; Dodd et al., 2022; Topping, 2022). The project can describe the supervision arrangements actually used across four organisations and what they cost in staff time, which is the practical question the literature leaves open.

Third, no literature was located addressing the safeguarding position of the peer facilitator as a role. The ethical literature warns against role confusion and emotional burden but does not establish how organisations should classify, prepare, supervise or protect a young person occupying that position. This is the clearest conceptual gap and the one closest to the project's own contribution. The working resolution set out in 3.12 – that accountability rests with the vetted adult who oversees the session rather than with the young person leading it – is a practical answer rather than an evidenced one, and testing how it holds in practice is part of what the pilots can contribute.

Fourth, the contextual safeguarding evidence base is dominated by research and practice development in the United Kingdom (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020; Lloyd et al., 2024; Owens et al., 2024). Its transfer across the four partner settings is assumed rather than demonstrated. Documenting how it does and does not translate is a finding of value beyond the project.

Fifth, safeguarding standards for non-formal settings are largely written for schools or statutory services, and the partner policies show why this matters: four organisations within the same religious family, working with comparable populations, have arrived at materially different reporting routes, vetting practices and digital provisions. Comparative documentation of that variation is itself a contribution.

Sixth, and most immediately consequential for the pilots, none of the partner instruments treats harm between young people as a distinct category with its own response route, even though the policy template used here looked for exactly that (3.2) and the prevalence evidence indicates it is the most likely serious incident in an adolescent peer group (3.9). The safeguarding literature establishes the conceptual apparatus for judging such behaviour (Hackett, 2014) and the contextual literature explains why it sits outside family-centred systems (Firmin, 2017), but neither tells an organisation what to do when a disclosure names another participant in the same session. Designing and testing that route across four jurisdictions with four different reporting duties is a contribution the partnership is unusually well placed to make.

Together these map onto the project's workstreams: the first two to the pilot evaluation, the third and sixth to the handbook and training design, the fourth to the partner-country analysis, and the fifth to the policy comparison already begun here. Stating them in this form establishes what the project can legitimately claim to contribute, and sets the boundary beyond which its findings should not be generalised.

3.16 LIMITATIONS & RESPONSIBLE CLAIMS

This review has limits that bear on how its conclusions should be used. It is a structured narrative review, not a systematic one: there was no registered protocol, screening was carried out by a single reviewer, and selection bias cannot be excluded. Coverage is uneven across the partnership, with considerably more published research available for the Netherlands and Malta than for Serbia and Slovakia. Serbia is absent from the principal European survey dataset used here, and comparable national prevalence data on peer victimisation, cyberbullying and online sexual harm could not be obtained for all four partner states. Prevalence is therefore reported at European level only, and no claim is made about the relative scale of need in any individual partner country. Only English-language sources were included, which is a material constraint in a project spanning four languages and working with a minority-language community. The contextual safeguarding literature is predominantly British, so its application here is argued rather than established. Digital safeguarding evidence also dates quickly: the EU Kids Online fieldwork concluded in 2019, and guidance current now will require revision as platforms, behaviours and technologies change.

The claims made here are therefore deliberately proportionate. The evidence supports the plausibility and value of peer-led, participatory safeguarding education in non-formal youth work, particularly where it is integrated with trauma-informed practice, inclusive participation and clear adult accountability. It does not support any promise that peer-led models alone will close safeguarding gaps, and it does not permit the claim that peer-led education reduces harm. The likely contribution of Safe & Sound is methodological and organisational: developing, piloting and refining a model that improves relevance, dialogue, confidence and institutional capacity, and documenting honestly what that requires.

3.17 WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUPPORTS

The literature supports the core proposition of this project: that adolescent safeguarding in European non-formal youth work needs a model that is participatory, relational, context-sensitive, digitally literate and clearly anchored in adult accountability. Each element carries an implementation requirement rather than only a conceptual one.

Returning to the four constructs:

1. Adolescence is a sensitive period for social learning, which is why peer-mediated education is developmentally apt and why a 13-to-19 band cannot be treated as one group (Dahl et al., 2018).
2. Safeguarding is more effective and more rights-respecting when young people shape the approaches affecting them, provided involvement is meaningful, inclusive and bounded (Lundy, 2007; Lefevre et al., 2019).
3. Adolescent risk is substantially located in peer groups, public space and digital environments, which justifies a contextual rather than individualised response (Owens et al., 2024).
4. Relational practice survives only where supervision, culture and clear responsibility hold it, conditions the partner policies show varying widely within a single partnership (Lloyd et al., 2024).

The strongest empirical finding in this review is also the most useful to the project: young people route distress through peers and rarely through professionals (Smahel et al., 2020). That is simultaneously the case for a peer-led model and the reason such a model must be tethered to adult systems. Peer-led safeguarding education is therefore best framed not as a youth substitute for professional systems but as supported peer facilitation within an adult-accountable one - with facilitation quality, group composition and supervision treated as the substance of the method rather than its administration.

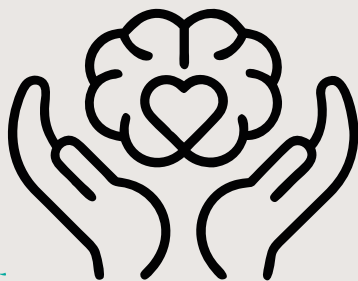


The table below summarises the evidence base and what each strand requires of the model. It is the hand-off point between this chapter and the design principles in chapter 10.

EVIDENCE AREA	WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS	IMPLICATION FOR SAFE & SOUND
Adolescent development	Adolescence is a sensitive period for social learning. The 13-19 age group spans three distinct stages: 13-14, 15-16 and 17-19 years.	Peer-mediated method is developmentally apt, but activities, facilitation, age and grouping must differentiate by band
Peer-led education effectiveness	Reliable gains in knowledge and attitudes; however, effects on behaviour are unclear or null.	Claim knowledge, confidence, dialogue and help-seeking only; do not claim harm reduction
Latrogenic risk in group work	Aggregating high-risk young people without skilled facilitation can worsen outcomes	Group composition and supervision are core method, not administration
Help-seeking	Young people route distress to peers, rarely to professionals	Strongest case for peer-led work and for tethering it to adult systems
Participation rights	Voice without influence is tokenistic and can be counterproductive	Young people must shape content and method, with a stated right to decline
Trauma, disclosure and wellbeing	Disclosure is partial, indirect and shaped by whether adults are trusted to act proportionately.	Train recognition, calm response and honest confidentiality limits; do not seek disclosure
Contextual safeguarding	Adolescent harm sits largely in peer groups, public space and online.	Work with contexts and peer norms and avoid drift into monitoring young people.
Harm between young people	Common, often normalised, and the most likely serious incident in a peer group	Support the young person harmed and respond to the one who caused harm, with statutory referral where the law requires it.
Digital risk	Online and offline harm are continuous; conduct risks dominate; AI harm outpaces the current evidence.	Integrate digital into relationships and consent by teaching principles, not platforms.

EVIDENCE AREA	WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS	IMPLICATION FOR SAFE & SOUND
Disability and neurodiversity	Substantially elevated risk; verbal group methods under-serve those at highest risk.	Vary the method; accessibility is a safeguarding requirement, not an add-on
Volunteer-led organisations	Standards assume paid staff; statutory duties often attach to named professions.	Set requirements a volunteer organisation can actually meet
Implementation and organisational culture	Outcomes depend more on delivery quality and organisational support than on programme design.	Fidelity support, supervision and leadership commitment are constitutive of the model
Recognition and evaluation	No settled instrument for safeguarding outcomes in non-formal settings.	Measure learning, confidence and delivery quality; specify competences before delivery

04 LEGAL & ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT ACROSS THE FOUR PARTNER COUNTRIES



4 LEGAL & ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT ACROSS THE FOUR PARTNER COUNTRIES

This chapter summarises, from desk research, the legal and organisational context in which the model will operate. Safeguarding across the partnership is shaped by three layers: European and international instruments, the national law of each partner country, and the canonical and organisational framework the partners share as Salesian entities. The summary is general by design and is not a substitute for local legal advice. It has not been reviewed by a qualified practitioner in any partner country, so reporting duties, exemptions, consent ages and vetting requirements must be confirmed locally before the model is piloted or this document is used to guide practice.

At European and international levels, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as interpreted in General comment No. 25, confirms that children's rights to provision, protection and participation apply in full in the digital environment (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021). The General Data Protection Regulation sets a default age of digital consent of 16, which Member States may lower to no less than 13, so consent thresholds are not uniform across Europe (Regulation (EU) 2016/679). The Council of Europe's Recommendation on youth work supplies the recognised standard for quality provision (Council of Europe, 2017). Together these instruments set a shared, rights-based baseline, but they leave the detail of child protection to national law.

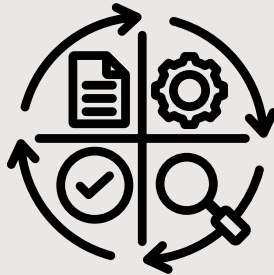
National frameworks differ considerably. Across the partnership, the obligation on an adult who receives a concern about a child ranges from an immediate professional duty to report, through a general criminal-law duty that applies to everyone, to a graduated protocol in which professionals must follow a reporting code but hold a right rather than a duty to report. Frameworks also differ in which relationships are exempt from reporting, in how adults working with children are vetted, and in whether volunteers carry the same duties as professionals. Partner safeguarding policies were read as evidence of organisational intent rather than practice, and they vary in how closely they reflect current law.

Alongside national law, the partners share a common canonical framework. As Salesian entities they are bound by canon law, including *Vos estis lux mundi*, which requires the reporting of abuse against minors and vulnerable adults and prohibits imposing silence on those who report (Francis, 2023), and by the congregational requirement that every province and house maintain a code of ethics for the protection of minors (Salesians of Don Bosco, 2020). The canonical and civil layers are cumulative rather than alternative. Meeting a canonical obligation does not discharge a civil one, and confessional exemptions do not extend to information received in ordinary youth work. Shared canonical status does not, however, mean shared organisational infrastructure. The partners differ in the maturity of their safeguarding policies, staffing and designated roles, and this matters because organisational containment is what determines whether relational and peer-led practice holds under pressure (Lloyd et al., 2024).

Two conclusions follow for the model. First, confidentiality cannot be scripted uniformly, because what a youth worker or peer facilitator may honestly promise after a disclosure depends on national law. Second, a model that assumes a common baseline of safeguarding infrastructure will not hold. The model should therefore be transferable but not uniform. The European and canonical layers provide common ground, while national law requires country-specific inserts.

05

METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH



5 METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The Erasmus+ application funds a research activity comprising a literature review, qualitative research and analysis of safeguarding practice across the partner countries. Chapter 3 is the first of these and Chapter 4 the third. This chapter sets out the design of the second: the qualitative fieldwork with youth workers, partner organisations and young people reported in Chapters 6 & 7.

5.1 DESIGN

The study uses a qualitative, multi-site design across the four partner countries. Qualitative method is appropriate because the research questions concern meaning, practice and conditions rather than prevalence: how youth leaders understand their safeguarding role, what they judge a safe conversation to require, and what organisational conditions exist in each setting. No claim to statistical representativeness is made or intended.

The design is train-the-trainers rather than conventional consultation. Focus groups were held with the youth leaders and animators who will subsequently deliver peer-led sessions in their own groups, so each session was simultaneously a data-collection exercise and the first iteration of the method. Every session followed the same four-part structure: a Mentimeter word association on the term safeguarding; a discussion of how comfortable participants feel raising safeguarding with young people; a discussion of what they would do when a problem arises and where they would turn; and a small-group design task in which participants created a peer-led activity or tool. The design task means the fieldwork produced prototype outputs as well as testimony, and those prototypes are reported alongside the discussion.



5.2 SAMPLING & RECRUITMENT

Purposive sampling was used in each country, with partner organisations acting as gatekeepers. Six Purposive sampling was used in each country, with partner organisations acting as gatekeepers. Seven focus groups were held between November 2025 and the close of the research activity, with 52 participants in total: two groups in Malta (5 and 8 participants), one in the Netherlands (6), two in Serbia (9 and 6) and two in Slovakia (9 and 9). Composition differed by country in ways that shape the findings and are reported rather than smoothed over. The Maltese groups were experienced practitioners drawn from oratory, residential care, a children's rights body and a young-offender programme. The Dutch group was the board and leadership of the camps organisation. The Serbian and Slovak groups were volunteer youth leaders and animators, many of them in their late teens and early twenties, several of whom had themselves come up through the same youth groups they now lead.

Gatekeeper recruitment carries a known risk: organisations tend to nominate their most confident and most engaged people. Because Section 3.6 identifies exactly this selection effect as a threat to peer-led models, it is recorded here as a live limitation on the findings rather than as a procedural note.

5.3 METHODS

Semi-structured interviews with youth workers and organisational leads, covering safeguarding knowledge, confidence, disclosure experience, digital practice, supervision and training needs.

Documentary analysis of the four partner safeguarding policies against the fixed template described in 3.2.

Focus groups with young people, using scenario-based prompts rather than direct questions about personal experience, so that participation does not require disclosure.

Observation and facilitator debrief during the pilot activities, feeding the evaluation framework in chapter 12.

5.4 ETHICS, CONSENT & SAFEGUARDING DURING THE RESEARCH

Research with adolescents on a safeguarding topic carries a foreseeable risk of disclosure, and the design must anticipate it rather than react to it (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). The following apply in every site.

Informed consent from participants and, where required by national law or organisational policy, from a parent or guardian. Consent is treated as renewable and revocable rather than obtained once at the start.

An explicit confidentiality statement before each session, given in the terms that apply in that country, as confirmed by the partner, so that no young person is told something that is not true in their jurisdiction.

A named safeguarding lead present or immediately contactable for every session with young people, with the referral route agreed in advance.

A stated right to decline any question, to leave at any point, and to have a contribution withdrawn afterwards, without consequence for their participation in the organisation.

Scenario-based prompts in youth sessions, so that useful data does not depend on personal disclosure.

Debriefing and a signposting sheet of national support services provided at the end of every youth session.

5.5 DATA PROTECTION

Personal data are processed under the General Data Protection Regulation, with the Serbian site handled under the equivalent national framework. Recordings are transcribed and then deleted; transcripts are pseudonymised at the point of transcription; participants are identified in reporting by role and country only. Data are held by the coordinating partner for the duration of the project and the retention period required by the funder, and no personal data are transferred outside the partnership. Young people are told, in plain language, what will be recorded, who will see it and how long it will be kept.

5.6 ANALYSIS

Transcripts are analysed thematically, with an initial coding frame derived from the four constructs in 3.1 and open coding for material those constructs do not capture. Youth and adult data are coded separately and compared at the interpretation stage, so that young people's accounts are not read only through professional categories. Country-level analysis is carried out before cross-country synthesis, so that partner-specific findings are not lost in aggregation.

5.7 LIMITATIONS

Six purposive groups in four sites; findings are indicative, not generalisable. Gatekeeper recruitment risks over-representing engaged participants. Sessions were conducted in four languages and in varying mixtures of English and the national language, with analysis in English, so nuance is lost in translation – the Maltese material in particular contains code-switching that the English record flattens. Participants may present practice as they believe it should be rather than as it is. Composition was not equivalent across countries, so cross-country comparison is indicative only. Most significantly, no focus groups were held with teenagers themselves: the evidence about young people's experience is either first-person testimony from youth leaders who are themselves young, or leaders' accounts of what young people bring to them. Chapter 7 states that constraint at the outset and does not exceed it.

5.8 HOW THE METHOD SERVES THE EXPECTED RESULTS

The application expects the research to produce a comprehensive analysis of youth participation in safeguarding, identification of best practices for safe spaces, a foundation for youth-worker training, country-specific findings and recommendations, and dissemination of findings. The youth strand addresses the first; the combined youth and worker strands address the second; chapter 6 supplies the third; chapters 4 and 8 supply the fourth; and chapter 12 addresses the fifth.

06

FINDINGS

YOUTH WORKERS & ORGANISATIONS



6 FINDINGS: YOUTH WORKERS AND ORGANISATIONS

This chapter reports what youth leaders, animators, educators and organisational leads across the four partners said about safeguarding in their own practice. It draws on seven focus groups held between November 2025 and the close of the research activity with 52 participants: two in Malta, one in the Netherlands, two in Serbia and two in Slovakia. Because the sessions were designed as train-the-trainers, the people speaking here are the people who will deliver the model, and their stated limits are therefore design constraints rather than opinions about it.

Where a finding holds across all four countries it is reported as such. Where it is specific to one, the country is named. Quotations are given in participants' own words, including where the English is not idiomatic, because the phrasing often carries the point.

6.1 PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE & SAFEGUARDING KNOWLEDGE

Comfort in discussing safeguarding was high in every country, and almost every participant said so unprompted. What varied was the basis of that comfort. In the Netherlands it was attributed to role clarity and to a national communication style - *"Dutch culture is very direct... we are more used to direct communication and just saying the problem"*. In Slovakia and Serbia, it was attributed to relationship and time: *"in our group we have a really good relationship, but it took seven years to build that relationship"*. In Malta it was attributed to professional role and to organisational backing.

Confidence in talking, however, is not the same as confidence in acting, and the gap between the two is the single most consistent finding of the fieldwork. It was stated most sharply by a Slovak volunteer describing her own reaction to a child approaching her: *"sometimes I start panicking and I'm like, oh no, call a trusted adult, even though I am the trusted adult, actually."* The same distinction recurs across the Serbian material, where participant after participant said they could listen but not act - *"I can talk to a person about it or a child, but I don't think I am capable of doing anything about it"; "if I'm not capable to resolve their problems... I will for sure tell them to speak with someone who is more professional."*

This should not be read as a deficit. Participants were describing an accurate assessment of their own role, and several articulated it as a principle rather than a limitation: *"there is maybe a question if it's a thing I can solve or I should try to solve."* One Slovak participant reflected on having over-involved herself in a case - *"I went to everybody to talk about it and to solve it... but it wasn't really my place"*. The fieldwork therefore corroborates the boundary the literature sets for peer facilitation in Section 3.6, with the important difference that here the intended facilitators set it themselves.

Knowledge of the term itself is uneven. A Slovak teacher with a five-year teaching qualification said of the design task: *"we personally don't know what safeguarding is, I had to google it as a term, but then I saw the situations they are related in... I was a witness of some of them."* The concept is recognised through its instances rather than its label, which has direct implications for how the toolkit opens.

6.2 TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE & HANDLING DISCLOSURE

Participants described disclosure as something that arrives without warning and rarely in a usable form. Several recounted first experiences: a Slovak leader was sixteen when a girl in her group confided in her, *"I wasn't sure what to do, it was my first experience with this"*; a Maltese participant described an incident after which the young person was removed from the service and never seen again, which still troubles them.

The confidentiality dilemma was named explicitly and independently in three countries, and always in the same terms: that consulting someone else in order to help may itself feel to the young person like a betrayal. A Slovak participant put it directly – *"this also can, from the child's perspective, feel like you're breaking their trust because you're telling somebody else about their problem, which is a really big dilemma for me, honestly"* – before concluding, correctly, *"you can't just say nothing and be like, well, it's a secret."* A Slovak leader working with eleven- and twelve-year-olds described the same bind over whether to involve a school or parents. No participant in any country reported having been given a form of words for this. It is the clearest single training need the fieldwork produced.

Participants also described the practical work of making a conversation possible, and their accounts converge on four things: an adult who speaks first and models vulnerability rather than waiting for the young person to open – *"there has to be someone who is first"*; rules set at the beginning, with one Slovak group using an explicit confidentiality rule the children find funny and therefore keep; not pushing, and following up individually after group discussion because *"some people could have problems with the sharing in front of a bigger group"*; and time, since trust is described everywhere as accumulated rather than established.

A recurring practice difficulty is distinguishing behaviour that warrants a safeguarding response from behaviour that does not. A Slovak sports coach described the judgement required between hazing and bullying among thirteen- to fifteen-year-old boys, and the further difficulty that the conversation with parents is *"a lot harder"* than the conversation with the children. The Slovak design task independently proposed inviting a professional to explain *"when boundaries in safeguarding are endangered, so what to look out for in the behaviour of kids"*, which is the same need expressed as a training request.



6.3 DIGITAL SAFEGUARDING IN PRACTICE

Digital risk was raised spontaneously in Malta and Slovakia but was not a dominant theme in any group, and no participant in any country described a digital safeguarding procedure in their own organisation. A Slovak teacher framed the problem generally – young people are *“really, really... endangered... by all the things that affect kids in these days, especially on social media and stuff, and they don't know how to work with it”* – and another described the difficulty of explaining to children why online caution matters when they do not perceive the danger: *“when we try to warn them or develop safe habits for them, like for example in using internet, they don't really have to know why is it so important, which is also our job to tell them why.”*

The Slovak design materials list cyber protection, grooming and scamming among the situations a session should cover, and the Serbian groups placed digital tools at the centre of their proposals. Beyond that the fieldwork is thin: nobody discussed image consent, contact channels between leaders and young people, or what is recorded about a young person, even though two partner policies address these matters in writing. The gap between policy provision and practitioner attention is itself the finding, and it sits directly against the internal-practice argument in 3.10.

6.4 PEER FACILITATION & SUPERVISION

Supervision as the literature describes it – scheduled, recorded, with a named supervisor – was not reported by any participant in any country. What exists instead is consultation with a trusted individual, and it is universal. Slovak participants named the director of the oratory, the chief of Domka, a Salesian, a co-leader, an older colleague, a head teacher, or in one centre a priest who is a qualified psychologist. Serbian participants named a priest, someone *“with more authority than me”*, or a professional. Dutch participants named a clear layered structure and a board that is visible and physically present. Maltese participants named organisational protocols and a licensing regime.

The distinction matters. Consultation is relational and depends on who happens to be available and trusted; supervision is structural and does not. Several Slovak participants said plainly that no dedicated function exists: *“I'm not aware of some psychologist or somebody who is like special for this”; “I don't think I know about any network here that would have this as a responsibility to deal with these situations.”* One added what amounts to a request for the model to supply it: *“it would be nice to have somebody that you can go and ask for advice and not be just like helpless.”*

Co-leading emerged as the de facto supervision mechanism. Slovak and Serbian participants repeatedly described working in pairs and discussing a case with a co-leader before acting, and the Dutch activity design encoded a four-eyes principle into the game itself, with one station accessible only to two people together. This is existing partnership practice and the model should build on it rather than import an unfamiliar structure.

Participants also volunteered the conditions under which they would be willing to facilitate: to open conversations rather than resolve cases, to know in advance who to escalate to, and to have permission not to know. Read against Section 3.6, the fieldwork supports supported peer facilitation within an adult-accountable system as a description of what these leaders already do, rather than as a constraint imposed on them.

6.5 ORGANISATIONAL READINESS & POLICY GAPS

Organisational conditions vary more than any other dimension, and not in the way the desk research predicted. The Netherlands reported the strongest structure: *"we have a very clear division, layered division in our organisation that people recognize and know how to approach... if I see a problem, I almost immediately know who I need to talk to."* Slovakia reported dense informal networks and named individuals but no dedicated function, with the significant exception of the ethics codex seminars that volunteers must complete before working with children, administered by a designated person in at least one centre. Malta reported the most formal apparatus and, simultaneously, the clearest statement of its limits.

That Maltese observation is the most important organisational finding of the fieldwork, because it identifies the failure mode the literature predicts. A participant with experience across several settings put it this way: *"typically protocols are in place. The question at times is whether everybody knows the protocols... although on paper the protocol is perfect or nearly."* A second described systems as *"still a little bit blurred with regards to actions or systems, and nothing is standard"*. Written provision and working knowledge are not the same thing, and chapter 4 can only evidence the first.

Two structural gaps recur across countries. The first is the absence of a route for concerns that are neither medical nor criminal. The Dutch group described it precisely: they know the national hotline and they know the hospital, and between the two there is nothing – *"we don't have a ready go-to group to access... we also don't know where to get that."* The Slovak groups reported the same absence in different words. The second is that external safeguards exist on paper but are unreachable in practice. The Dutch external confidential advisor is *"just a number on the board"*, someone *"you don't even have a face to go with"*; the group's own conclusion was that having such a person is right and legally required, but *"just having that doesn't invite people to share the problem."*

Where young people are concerned, the Serbian groups reported active distrust of the formal system rather than unfamiliarity with it – police described as untrustworthy because *"a lot of the things end up in the newspaper pretty quickly"*, the system as a whole *"severely underutilised, even underfunded... just not effective"*, and teachers ruled out as confidants because *"that will be shared around the school"*. No other country reported distrust at this level. It is a delivery condition for Serbia rather than a general finding.



6.6 TRAINING NEEDS

Participants named their own training needs consistently, and the list is short. First, what to say about confidentiality – a form of words that is honest about what happens next and does not promise secrecy. Second, how to distinguish behaviour requiring a safeguarding response from ordinary adolescent conflict, including the hazing-versus-bullying judgement raised in Slovakia. Third, where to go for concerns that are serious but not criminal, written down rather than held in memory. Fourth, how to notice: the Slovak design group put it as needing *“to have open eyes for some possibility of... bullying happening, so that we can see if something is happening, because most of the times, even if something is happening, we are not really looking and seeing.”*

Two further needs were expressed indirectly. Participants who had handled a disclosure described lasting personal impact and no debrief, which indicates a facilitator wellbeing requirement the literature also predicts. And the request in three countries to bring in an external professional – to explain the theory, to answer specific questions, to say where the boundaries lie – suggests the training should include a practitioner voice rather than being delivered peer-to-peer throughout.

Notably, no participant asked for more safeguarding content knowledge in the abstract. Every stated need concerned what to do in a specific moment. The training programme should be built accordingly, around decisions rather than definitions.



07

FINDINGS

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES



7 FINDING: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

A statement of what this chapter can and cannot be. No focus groups were held with teenagers. The research design was train-the-trainers, and the participants were the youth leaders who will deliver the model. This chapter therefore rests on two sources, and distinguishes between them throughout. The first is first-person testimony from participants who are themselves young: the Serbian animators, and a majority of the Slovak participants, were aged between nineteen and their mid-twenties, and several spoke about their own help-seeking, their own fears and what they themselves would do. The second is youth leaders' accounts of what young people bring to them, which is second-hand evidence and is labelled as such.

The absence of direct youth voice is a real limitation for a project whose priorities include participation and youth-led activity, and it should be corrected during the pilots rather than after them. Chapter 11 recommends how. Where the fieldwork provides no evidence on a question, this chapter says so instead of filling the gap from the literature.

7.1 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND SAFEGUARDING TO MEAN

The word association exercise was run in all six groups and provides the clearest cross-country evidence in the dataset. The results diverge sharply. Serbia returned guarding imagery almost exclusively – safety, security, guard, lock, protector, keeper, guardian, bodyguard, uniform, officer, and in one group a dog. Slovakia returned a recognisably professional vocabulary – protection, prevention, respect, trust, boundaries, vulnerability, mental health, ethics, safe space, minorities. The Netherlands returned structural and rights language – rules, guidelines, object, be yourself, and one participant's image of the railings at the side of a highway. Malta returned protection, safe environment and listening, with several responses given in Maltese.

Two things follow. The same English word produces materially different mental models in the four countries, so a handbook that opens with the term will start from a different place in each. And the Serbian pattern in particular – safeguarding as something done by a guard to a person – sits uneasily with a model premised on young people participating in their own safety, which is a framing problem the Serbian materials will need to address directly.

One Dutch participant articulated what the exercise exposed: safeguarding *"implies that there is something that needs to be guarded... there needs to be a definition of what exactly we're trying to preserve."* A Slovak teacher reported having to look the term up, while recognising every situation it covers.

7.2 WHAT MAKES A CONVERSATION FEEL SAFE OR UNSAFE

Participants described four conditions, and they were consistent across countries. An adult goes first: *"there has to be someone who is first"*, and several Slovak leaders described deliberately making themselves vulnerable before expecting young people to. Rules are set at the beginning and are kept, including an explicit rule that what is said in the group stays there. Nobody is pushed, and there is a route to speak privately afterwards for those who cannot speak in front of a group. And it takes time: *"I remember the beginnings with the boys group when they were all silent... but later, by the years, they are all communicating very well."*

Participants also identified what makes a space unsafe. Being singled out in front of peers; an adult who reacts with alarm; and, in Serbia, any route that might expose the young person socially – the fear named there was not of the adult but of what other young people would then know.

The Slovak design task took this further than discussion. One group designed an activity in which participants write down a vulnerable moment and then experience it being handled three ways: read aloud by someone else with their name attached, read out by themselves, or read anonymously at random, with a discussion afterwards about how each felt. As a piece of experiential design it is precise about the variable that matters. As a safeguarding proposition it carries obvious risk, and chapter 9 addresses how it could be used safely.

7.3 WHO THEY GO TO, & WHY

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7.4 TRUST IN PEERS & TRUST IN ADULTS

Trust in an adult was described as earned through consistency and presence rather than granted by role. Slovak participants described relationships built over six and seven years, and the Dutch group attributed their own approachability to being visible and “*on the floor*” rather than to holding a title.

On what a peer can and cannot hold, the young Serbian participants were unusually clear about their own limits, and this is the most consequential youth-perspective finding in the dataset. They were willing to listen, unwilling to advise, and consistent in saying they would pass the matter on: “*I can listen about it... but I don't think I am capable of doing anything about it*”; “*I would tell them to go to someone who is more capable*”. Two conditions on peer trust were named. Peers are trusted because they are not embedded in the institution – which is the same reason teachers are not trusted. And peer knowledge carries social risk: the fear of being judged or bullied for having sought help was named repeatedly as the main deterrent.

There is no evidence in this dataset on how young people would respond to a peer facilitating a structured session, because no such session had yet taken place. That question belongs to the pilots and is included in the evaluation framework in chapter 11.

7.5 CONFIDENTIALITY: WHAT THEY EXPECT & WHAT THEY WANT

The strongest evidence here is indirect but consistent. Youth leaders in Slovakia described the dilemma from the other side – that consulting a colleague in order to help “*can, from the child's perspective, feel like you're breaking their trust*”. Serbian participants described the fear that a disclosure would circulate: through the school if made to a teacher, and through the press if made to the police.

What young people appear to want is therefore not secrecy but predictability: to know in advance what will happen with what they say. No participant in any country reported that young people are routinely told this before a conversation begins. Section 3.6 argues that clarity about limits is a precondition of trust rather than a threat to it; the fieldwork does not contradict that, and the Slovak practice of setting an explicit confidentiality rule at the start of a group supports it.

Direct evidence from teenagers on how they react to being told the limits does not exist in this dataset. It is a specific question for the pilots.

7.6 DIGITAL LIFE & DIGITAL RISK IN THEIR OWN TERMS

This is the thinnest section of the chapter, and the gap is itself worth recording. Digital risk appeared in the Slovak and Maltese discussions as an adult concern about young people rather than as an account of young people's own experience, and the Serbian and Dutch groups barely raised it.

Where young people's perspective does appear, it appears in the tools they designed rather than in what they said. All three Serbian proposals were digital, anonymous and free: an app for sharing experiences with an optional route to professional help and identity checks to prevent misuse; a "Safety" app connecting young people to trained volunteers by chat, call or video with escalation to professionals; and a "Talk to Me" app with anonymous posting, a public question board and one-to-one video sessions with a psychologist. That every Serbian proposal was an app, while every Dutch and Maltese proposal was a physical group activity, is the sharpest single divergence in the dataset. Read alongside the Serbian distrust of institutions, the preference looks less like a preference for technology than a preference for anonymity.

No evidence was gathered on young people's experience of image-sharing, online sexual harm or AI-generated content. Given that these are named project topics, this is a gap the pilots should close.

7.7 PARTICIPATION: WHAT THEY WANT TO DECIDE

The design task was itself the participation exercise, and what participants produced tells more than what they said about participation in the abstract. Given an open brief, every group produced something usable, and none produced an awareness campaign or a poster. The Maltese groups designed an escape room for young leaders and a ground-rules treasure hunt; the Dutch group designed a trust-as-currency game with an embedded four-eyes rule and a pre-game quiz on the camp rules; the Slovak groups designed a vulnerability exercise and a picture-and-role-play sequence culminating in a practitioner Q&A; the Serbian groups designed three digital platforms.

Two patterns are worth carrying into the pilots. Every design was experiential rather than instructional – nobody proposed a lesson. And several designs built in the transition from peer discussion to expert input, with the Slovak groups explicitly proposing to invite a professional at the end. The intended facilitators, in other words, designed adult accountability into their own activities without being asked to.

No evidence was gathered on what young people themselves want influence over. The design task was completed by youth leaders, and although many are young, they were acting in a leadership role.

7.8 BARRIERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Stigma was named as the primary barrier, and only in Serbia was it examined in detail. Seeking psychological help was described as carrying a social penalty: *"in our country seeking help from psychologist or therapist seems like if you go to therapist, you're probably crazy person"*. A second participant described the reaction of family and friends - *"they just have that look like it's not normal thing"* - and a third described a local mentality in which *"you just keep them to yourself and don't talk about it"*. Fear of judgement by other young people was named repeatedly, including the fear of being bullied for having sought help. One participant added that some who are being abused minimise it themselves, assuming their situation is not serious enough to report.

Structural barriers were named alongside the attitudinal ones. Serbian participants described state services as inaccessible and untrustworthy and said they would use private clinics instead - which is itself a barrier for anyone unable to pay. A Slovak participant described the case of a child harmed by their own parents, where the standard route of contacting parents was unusable.

On the populations Section 3.13 identifies as least served, the fieldwork adds almost nothing. No participant discussed disability or neurodiversity. No participant discussed minority-language delivery, including in Serbia, where it is a stated design requirement. Migration was mentioned once in Malta, in passing. Given the project's commitment to young people with fewer opportunities, the silence is a finding: the intended facilitators are not currently thinking in these terms, and the training will have to introduce the subject rather than build on existing awareness.

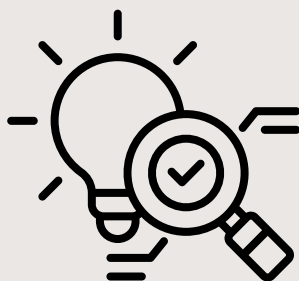
7.9 WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOUTH WORKERS

Drawing together what participants said they valued, both as leaders and, in the Serbian and Slovak groups, as young people speaking about themselves, five things recur. Somebody who goes first and is willing to be vulnerable rather than waiting to be approached. Somebody consistently present over time, since trust was described everywhere as accumulated. Somebody who does not react with alarm, and who can tell the difference between a serious matter and ordinary conflict. Somebody honest about what happens next rather than promising secrecy. And somebody who knows where to go when the matter exceeds them and says so plainly instead of improvising.

The last of these was expressed as a want by the leaders themselves as often as it was attributed to young people, which suggests it is the same requirement viewed from two positions.

8

SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION



8 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter brings the three evidence strands together: the published literature in Chapter 3, the legal and organisational analysis in Chapter 4, and the empirical findings in Chapters 6 and 7. Its purpose is to establish what the partnership can now say with confidence, what remains uncertain, and what the combination means for the model.

8.1 WHERE THE STRANDS ALREADY CONVERGE

Three findings are supported by more than one strand and can be stated with reasonable confidence even before the fieldwork is complete.

Supervision and facilitation quality are decisive.

The peer-education effectiveness literature attributes most observed variation to these factors, the harm literature identifies unsupervised group composition as the specific configuration that produces damage, the implementation literature finds delivery quality and organisational support to matter more than programme design, and the relationship-based practice literature finds that relational aspirations collapse without systemic support. Four independent bodies of evidence converge on one variable.

Adult accountability cannot be delegated.

The rights literature, the ethical literature on peer education and the comparative legal analysis all arrive at the same place from different directions: in every one of the four jurisdictions, legal responsibility attaches to adults, and no model design can move it.

Confidentiality cannot be scripted uniformly.

This follows from Chapter 4 alone but is reinforced by the disclosure literature, which finds that young people fear arbitrary adult action more than clearly explained boundaries. A single European script would be inaccurate in at least three of the four countries.

8.2 WHERE THE STRANDS ARE LIKELY TO DIVERGE

Four divergences emerged, and each has a design consequence.

The literature treats supervision as a structure; the fieldwork found a relationship. Sections 3.6 and 3.14 identify supervision as the variable determining whether peer-led work helps or harms, and describe it as a function. No participant in any of the four countries reported supervision in that sense. What exists everywhere is consultation with a trusted individual - a co-leader, a director, a Salesian, an older colleague. The model cannot assume a structure that does not exist, but it can formalise the practice that does: naming the person in advance rather than leaving it to who happens to be available.

The literature treats confidentiality as a message to deliver; participants experience it as a dilemma with no answer. The disclosure literature in 3.7 holds that clarity about limits supports trust. Youth leaders in three countries described the opposite fear - that consulting anyone else would be experienced as betrayal - and none had been given a form of words. The divergence is not about whether clarity helps but about the absence of any script, which is a gap the toolkit must close rather than a disagreement to resolve.

The literature frames young people's reluctance as fear of adult overreaction; the Serbian fieldwork frames it as institutional distrust and social exposure. Section 3.7 attributes non-disclosure largely to uncertainty about how adults will respond. Serbian participants described something different and more specific: services that leak, teachers embedded in the social world of the school, police whose involvement reaches the press, and peers who will judge. The design consequence is that anonymity matters more in some partner contexts than the relational literature predicts, and that a model built only on trusted relationships will under-serve young people who have concluded that no institution is trustworthy.

The literature treats digital safeguarding as a domain; participants treated it as either a worry about young people or as the delivery medium itself. Section 3.10 argues for integrating digital into discussions of relationships and consent. Maltese and Slovak participants raised online risk as an adult concern and no participant described a digital practice standard, while every Serbian design proposal was an anonymous app. The two positions are not in conflict, but together they suggest the model should treat digital as a channel young people trust for help-seeking, and not only as a source of risk to be taught about.

One convergence is worth recording alongside the divergences, because it was not predicted. The intended facilitators set the peer boundary themselves, unprompted, and set it close to where the ethical literature sets it. The model does not need to persuade them of it.

8.3 WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE MODEL

The evidence supports the Safe & Sound proposition but disciplines it in four ways. The method is developmentally apt and addresses a real gap, since existing safeguarding resources are written for schools or statutory services and few are designed for non-formal conditions. It must differentiate across the 13-19 band rather than treating it as one group. It must treat supervision, group composition and facilitation quality as the substance of the method rather than the administration around it. And it must be described accurately: supported peer facilitation within an adult-accountable safeguarding system, not young people taking responsibility for safeguarding.

8.4 THE REALISTIC CONTRIBUTION

Safe & Sound can reasonably expect to improve safeguarding awareness among participating teenagers, confidence to have safety conversations, help-seeking literacy, the quality of youth participation in partner organisations, youth-worker competence and organisational safeguarding capacity. It can also expect to produce something that does not currently exist: a documented, tested method for peer-led safeguarding education in non-formal settings, with the legal and organisational conditions for its transfer set out for four different European contexts.

It cannot claim, and should not be described as claiming, that peer-led safeguarding education reduces abuse or prevents harm. The measured evidence does not support that claim for peer education generally, no evidence exists for it in non-formal safeguarding specifically, and the project has neither the sample size nor the follow-up period to generate it. Stating this plainly is not modesty; it is what allows the claims the project does make to be believed.

9

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE SAFE & SOUND MODEL



9 DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE SAFE & SOUND MODEL

This is the bridge chapter. Everything in it follows from the evidence in Chapters 3 and 4 and the findings in Chapters 6 and 7, and the principles have been revised against the fieldwork rather than derived from the literature alone. It is written as instruction rather than analysis, because its readers are the people building the training programme, the toolkit and the pilots. Each principle states what must be true of the model, and where the requirement comes from.

PRINCIPLE	WHAT THE MODEL MUST DO	SOURCE
Adult accountability	A named, vetted adult is accountable for every peer-led session and is present or immediately contactable. Accountability for vetting, receiving and escalating disclosures, and the safety of the activity attaches to that adult and never to the young facilitator. The adult is named to participants at the start, not merely recorded in a plan.	Refer to Sections 3.6, 3.12 and Chapter 4.
Peer facilitation	Young facilitators run conversations, not cases: they open a topic, hold a discussion and hand over. The fieldwork confirms they already understand this - "I can listen... but I don't think I am capable of doing anything about it" - so training should confirm the boundary rather than argue for it, and give facilitators explicit permission not to know.	
Age differentiation	Activities, facilitator age and group composition differ across early (13-14), mid (15-16) and late (17-19) adolescence. Facilitators are drawn from the upper band. Bands are not mixed where disclosure is foreseeable. Leaders working with younger children reported the least confidence, so preparation is weighted towards them.	Refer to Section 3.3.

PRINCIPLE	WHAT THE MODEL MUST DO	SOURCE
Inclusion and fewer opportunities	Every session offers at least one non-verbal or small-group route to participation, and a private route afterwards. Materials are in the language of delivery, not translated at the point of use. Facilitator selection deliberately includes quieter and marginalised young people. Disability, neurodiversity and minority-language delivery were raised nowhere in the fieldwork, so training must introduce them rather than assume awareness.	Refer to Sections 3.5 and 3.13.
Trauma-informed delivery	No activity requires personal disclosure; scenario and third-person framing is the default. Adults respond calmly and never attempt to establish a young person's history. Where an activity invites participants to share something of their own, sharing is opt-in, anonymised by default, never attributed by another person without consent, and followed by a structured debrief.	Refer to Sections 3.7 and 3.13.
Safe spaces	Four observable conditions, drawn from what participants themselves described: an adult goes first and models openness rather than waiting to be approached; rules are agreed at the start and kept; nobody is pushed, and there is a private route afterwards; participants know what happens to what they say and where to go next. Trust accumulates over time, so a single session with an unfamiliar group will not produce it.	Refer to Section 3.7 and Chapter 7.
Confidentiality and disclosure	Facilitators explain the limits of confidentiality before discussion begins, using the wording for their country in 4.1. Nobody promises secrecy. No participant in any country had been given such a form of words, and three described the resulting dilemma unprompted. Supplying the script is the highest-priority toolkit output, and it must cover what the facilitator says at the moment of handing over.	Refer to Sections 3.6, 3.7 and Chapter 4
Harm between young people	Each partner has a written route for a disclosure that names another participant, covering who is informed, how both young people are separately supported, and what is recorded. No pilot runs without it. Leaders also need the criteria for distinguishing a safeguarding matter from ordinary conflict - the hazing-versus-bullying judgement raised in the fieldwork.	Refer to Section 3.9.

PRINCIPLE	WHAT THE MODEL MUST DO	SOURCE
Digital safeguarding	Digital content is integrated into discussion of relationships, consent and pressure rather than delivered as a technical module; principles are taught, not platforms. Contact channels, image consent and recording are governed by one written standard satisfying the strictest partner requirement - no participant described such a standard in practice. Digital channels are also treated as a help-seeking route, since every tool designed in Serbia was an anonymous app.	Refer to Section 3.10 and Chapter 4.
Group composition	Groups are not composed by aggregating already-high-risk young people. Pilots run inside established youth groups with existing relationships and adult familiarity rather than groups assembled for the purpose - which is also what participants said makes the conversation possible.	Refer to Section 3.6.
Supervision	Supervision is a named person, not a structure. No partner reported supervision in the formal sense; all reported consultation with a trusted individual, and co-leading in pairs is existing practice everywhere. The model formalises what exists: every facilitator is paired and has a named person identified in advance, with a pre-session briefing and post-session debrief. Time is budgeted and recorded. Wellbeing is checked, not assumed.	Refer to Section 3.7 and Chapter 7.
Confidentiality and disclosure	Facilitators explain the limits of confidentiality before discussion begins, using the wording for their country in 4.1. Nobody promises secrecy. No participant in any country had been given such a form of words, and three described the resulting dilemma unprompted. Supplying the script is the highest-priority toolkit output, and it must cover what the facilitator says at the moment of handing over.	Refer to Sections 3.6 and 3.14.
Youth participation	Young people shape content and method, not only delivery. Where a suggestion is not adopted they are told why. Participation is voluntary and revocable at every stage. The design task showed intended facilitators produce experiential rather than instructional activities when given an open brief; the model should preserve that.	Refer to Section 3.5.

PRINCIPLE	WHAT THE MODEL MUST DO	SOURCE
Country adaptation	The model is transferable but not uniform. Confidentiality wording, referral routes, consent ages and vetting requirements are country-specific inserts.	Refer to Chapter 4.
Referral pathways	Every site has a one-page referral map - internal designated person, external statutory route, national helpline - displayed and known before delivery. It must include a route for concerns that are serious but neither medical nor criminal, which no partner currently has, and at least one route young people will actually use where trust in statutory services is low.	Refer to Section 3.12 and Chapter 4.

10

DESIGN PRINCIPLES
FOR THE SAFE &
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10 DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR THE SAFE & SOUND MODEL

This is the bridge chapter. Everything in it follows from the evidence in chapters 3 and 4 and the findings in chapters 6 to 8, and the principles have been revised against the fieldwork rather than derived from the literature alone. It is written as instruction rather than analysis, because its readers are the people building the training programme, the handbook and the pilots. Each principle states what must be true of the model, and where the requirement comes from.

10.1 FOR THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Build the course around decisions rather than definitions. No participant in any country asked for more safeguarding content in the abstract; every stated need concerned what to do in a specific moment. Supervision and facilitation quality remain the variables the evidence identifies as decisive.

Include a jurisdiction module in which every participant practises stating the confidentiality position for their own country, using the country insert for their jurisdiction, and practises the handover sentence - what they say at the moment they involve someone else. This is the need participants named most often and the one nobody has been trained in.

Train recognition and calm response to distress, with explicit instruction not to seek disclosure and not to attempt trauma histories. Include the threshold judgement participants find hardest: distinguishing a safeguarding matter from ordinary adolescent conflict.

Include a session on harm between young people, covering the response route and the position that a young person who has caused harm remains a safeguarding subject. Cover the case where the parents are the source of harm, which participants encountered and found the standard route unusable for.

Cover accessibility as method - how to run a session that does not depend on confident verbal participation - rather than as a statement of values. The fieldwork raised disability, neurodiversity and minority-language delivery nowhere, so this must be introduced rather than reinforced.

10.2 FOR THE TOOLKIT & MANUAL

Lead with the confidentiality script. It is the single output participants across all four countries asked for and none has, and it should appear before the conceptual material rather than after it.

Write country inserts, not a common script, for confidentiality, referral routes, consent ages, vetting and image permissions - and for the opening framing, since the same word produced guarding imagery in Serbia, structural language in the Netherlands and professional vocabulary in Slovakia.

Provide disclosure scripts in four versions - one per jurisdiction - each stating honestly what happens after a young person speaks, and each including what the facilitator says when handing over, which is the moment participants described as feeling like betrayal.

Use young people's own language, drawn from Chapter 7, rather than professional safeguarding vocabulary. One qualified teacher in the fieldwork had to look the term up while recognising every situation it covers, so the toolkit should open with situations and arrive at the term.

Cover accessibility as method - how to run a session that does not depend on confident verbal participation - ratherProduce it in the delivery language of each partner including Croatian for the Serbian site, and design examples for cultural adaptation rather than direct translation. than as a statement of values. The fieldwork raised disability, neurodiversity and minority-language delivery nowhere, so this must be introduced rather than reinforced.

Include an accessibility annex: non-verbal participation routes, plain-language versions, and guidance for facilitators working with neurodivergent participants. Include a one-page referral map template per country, covering the gap every partner reported - where to go with a concern that is serious but neither medical nor criminal.

11

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK



11 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The framework measures what the model can plausibly shift and does not attempt to measure what it cannot. It has been extended against the fieldwork: the confidentiality script, the safeguarding-versus-conflict judgement, facilitator pairing and the missing referral route are now measured, because each was identified as absent in every partner. There is no indicator for reduced abuse or reduced harm: the evidence base does not support such a claim, and a fourteen-month project with small pilot groups has no realistic way to measure it. Attempting to would produce a number nobody should believe.

Indicators are grouped into four types. Process indicators record whether the activity happened as designed. Learning indicators record change in knowledge, confidence and capability. Safeguarding indicators record whether the conditions for safe delivery were in place and whether the system worked when tested. Outcome indicators record the changes the evidence supports claiming.

TYPE	INDICATOR	WHO	HOW MEASURED
PROCESS	Pilot sessions delivered as designed, against the fourteen design principles	Partner organisations	Session checklist completed by the accountable adult
PROCESS	Named accountable adult present or contactable for every session	Partner organisations	Session record; target 100%
PROCESS	Supervision time delivered and recorded per facilitator	Partner organisations	Briefing and debrief log, with staff hours
PROCESS	Referral map displayed and known before delivery begins	Partner organisations	Pre-pilot readiness check

TYPE	INDICATOR	WHO	HOW MEASURED
LEARNING	Youth-worker confidence in responding to a disclosure	Youth workers	Self-rating before training, after training, after pilot
LEARNING	Youth-worker ability to state the confidentiality position for their own country accurately	Youth workers	Short scenario test against the country insert; scored, not self-rated
LEARNING	Youth-worker knowledge of the internal and external referral route	Youth workers	Scenario test at the end of training
LEARNING	Facilitation quality	Peer facilitators	Observation rubric completed by the accountable adult, plus facilitator self-assessment
LEARNING	Young people's safeguarding knowledge and help-seeking literacy – knowing who to tell and what happens next	Teenagers	Short before-and-after activity, age-appropriate, not a test
LEARNING	Young people's confidence to raise a safety concern	Teenagers	Self-rating before and after, with a decline-to-answer option
SAFEGUARDING	Written route for harm between participants in place before piloting	Partner organisations	Yes/no readiness gate; a 'no' stops the pilot
SAFEGUARDING	Vetting evidence held for every supervising adult	Partner organisations	Pre-pilot audit
SAFEGUARDING	Disclosures arising during pilots handled according to the country route	Partner organisations	Anonymised incident log reviewed at post-pilot review

TYPE	INDICATOR	WHO	HOW MEASURED
SAFEGUARDING	Facilitator wellbeing checked after every session	Peer facilitators	Debrief record
SAFEGUARDING	Every facilitator paired, with a named supervising adult identified before the session	Partner organisations	Pre-session record; target 100%
SAFEGUARDING	Referral map in place covering concerns that are serious but neither medical nor criminal	Partner organisations	Pre-pilot readiness gate; a 'no' stops the pilot
OUTCOME	Young people's perceived safety of the sessions	Teenagers	Four safe-space conditions rated by participants
OUTCOME	Participation quality – whether young people shaped content and method	Teenagers	Space, voice, audience and influence self-assessment
OUTCOME	Clarity of digital-safety messages as judged by participants	Teenagers	Post-session feedback
OUTCOME	Organisational readiness change over the project	Partner organisations	Repeat of the policy template described in 3.2 at start and end
OUTCOME	Feedback demonstrably used to revise handbook and training	Project	Documented changes between first and second editions
OUTCOME	At least one pilot session per country delivered with teenagers and reported as youth voice	Teenagers	Session record and youth feedback activity

TYPE	INDICATOR	WHO	HOW MEASURED
OUTCOME	Change in how participants describe safeguarding between first and last session	Teenagers	Repeat of the word-association exercise used in the fieldwork
LEARNING	Youth-worker ability to state the confidentiality position for their own country, and to deliver the handover sentence	Youth workers	Scored scenario test against the country insert, before and after training
LEARNING	Youth-worker ability to distinguish a safeguarding matter from ordinary adolescent conflict	Youth workers	Scored scenario set including the hazing-versus-bullying judgement
LEARNING	Youth-worker ability to distinguish a safeguarding matter from ordinary adolescent conflict	Youth workers	Scored scenario set including the hazing-versus-bullying judgement
Safeguarding	Every facilitator paired, with a named supervising adult identified before the session	Partner organisations	Pre-session record; target 100%
Safeguarding	Referral map in place covering concerns that are serious but neither medical nor criminal	Partner organisations	Pre-pilot readiness gate; a 'no' stops the pilot
Outcome	At least one pilot session per country delivered with teenagers and reported as youth voice	Teenagers	Session record and youth feedback activity
Outcome	Change in how participants describe safeguarding between first and last session	Teenagers	Repeat of the word-association exercise used in the fieldwork

12

CONCLUSION & DISSEMINATION



12 CONCLUSION AND DISSEMINATION

Safe & Sound set out to develop a peer-led safeguarding education model for teenagers in non-formal youth work. This research establishes that the proposition is sound, that the method addresses a real gap, and that it works only under conditions the project must build deliberately rather than assume.

The contribution is threefold. The project now has an honest account of what peer-led safeguarding education can and cannot achieve, which protects it from the overclaiming that damages credibility in this field. It has an account of the legal and organisational conditions a transnational safeguarding model has to work within, which any organisation attempting a similar transfer could use. And it has identified, before piloting rather than after, that no partner currently has a route for handling harm between young people - the most likely serious incident in an adolescent peer group.

12.1 DISSEMINATION

Share the method through SALTO-YOUTH resource centres and partner networks, framed as a non-formal alternative to school-curriculum and statutory-procedure safeguarding resources.

Run multiplier events in each partner country, with young people who took part in the pilots presenting alongside youth workers rather than being described by them.

● Offer Chapter 4, together with the verified country inserts, separately to Salesian provinces and to youth organisations working across borders, since the legal analysis has value independent of the model.

Report honestly on what the pilots did and did not show. A project that publishes its null findings is more useful to the sector, and more credible, than one that does not.

12.2 SUSTAINABILITY

Three things determine whether anything survives October 2026: whether each partner adopts the harm-between-young-people route into its own policy, whether supervision capacity is built into ordinary operations rather than funded activity, and whether the young people trained as facilitators have a standing role in their organisation afterwards rather than a project-length one. The third is the weakest point in the current design and should be addressed before the pilots end.

13

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13 REFERENCES

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